



Class 248, 35

Book B756s

General Theological Seminary Library

Chelsea Square, New York

Quiet day
Sent

Purchased from the fund bequeathed to the Seminary by

EUGENE AUGUSTUS HOFFMAN, D. D.

DEAN 1879-1902

21 x 11

THE SACRED WAY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Wondrous Love : the Joy of Personal Devotion to Jesus. With a Frontispiece. Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. net.

Life's Power : a Word of Help for the Days. With a Frontispiece. Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. net.

Love's Ascent : Considerations of Some Degrees of Spiritual Attainment. With Frontispiece in colour. Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. net.

The Passion in the Spiritual Life. With a Frontispiece, The Crucifixion, by Fra Angelico. Crown 8vo, 3s. net.

The Garden of God : some Characteristics of the Spiritual Life, mainly from the Song of Songs. With Frontispiece after Design by Sir EDWARD BURNE-JONES, Bart. Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. net.

The Altar and the Life : Meditations on the Blessed Sacrament in Relation to the Development of the Spiritual Life. Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. net.

"Help from the Sanctuary." Devotional Papers on the Blessed Sacrament. With Frontispiece. Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. net.

"Anima Christi." Devotional Addresses. Crown 8vo, 1s. net.

Humility : a Devotional Treatise. Fcap. 8vo, 2s. net.


Incarnate Love : Meditations on the Love of Jesus. Fcap. 8vo, 2s. net.

The Sympathy of the Crucified. Fcap. 8vo, 2s. net.

The Blessed Life : Devotional Studies of the Beatitudes. Fcap. 8vo, 2s. net.

LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.

LONDON, NEW YORK, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA,
MADRAS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025



By permission of Frederick Hollyer

THE SACRED WAY

BY THE

REV. JESSE BRETT, L.T.H.

CHAPLAIN OF ALL SAINTS' HOSPITAL, EASTBOURNE

AUTHOR OF

"THE ALTAR AND THE LIFE," "LIFE'S POWER," "WONDROUS
LOVE," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK

BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

1916

ALL THE LIBRARY
LIBRARY

248.35
B756s

62595

The Frontispiece is from the pencil design in the series of illustrations of "The Song of Solomon," by the late Sir Edward Burne-Jones, Bart. It is reproduced by permission from a photograph by Mr. Fredk. Hollyer.

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LIBRARY

1000

PREFACE

THE subject of this book has always had a peculiar fascination for the devout Christian. Again and again have preachers and writers dwelt upon the Heavenward journey of the soul, the dangers and attractions of the way, the changing experience of the pilgrim in conflict and victory, and the reward of his faithfulness. Some mystical writers have defined the spiritual course with refined exactitude; and their writings are not the least valuable among the literary treasures of the Church. We can never part with the works of S. Augustine, S. Bernard, S. John of the Cross, S. Teresa, Walter Hilton, and the host of others from whose words and experience we have learned so much of the deeper ways of the soul's life. No spiritual writer of to-day can afford to ignore them. Their teaching, so Catholic in the best sense, so true in its psychology, is an ever-present influence; for they meet us on the ground of our highest spiritual experience, they are in sympathy with us in all that is most sacred in personal religion. This is a source of great strength to us in the realization of our part with them in all that belongs to the inner life of the Church. Under wise direction the devout student must aspire to the perfections which he admires in the Saints, notwithstanding the difficulties which he is taught to expect and be prepared for.

This book does not pretend to be a complete chart of the soul's way to perfection. It deals with some experiences within the sacred way which are common to devout souls. It is an attempt to bring help to some in the perplexities of the spiritual life. And perhaps this may not be untimely, considering the many interior difficulties inseparable from a period of universal trouble. Many are feeling the need of guidance for themselves. There is a clear call to spiritual advance. The spiritual demands of this time become only the more imperative as the true inwardness of the Great War is being understood. And the call can be obeyed only as the individual is made strong in religion that is at once personal, and true to saintly ideals. It must be the religion both of experience and of faith. We should raise our ideals, and aspire to them in full consciousness of the tremendous demands of this most wonderful time in the history of the world. In a true sense we are makers of the future we may not live to see; for upon the reality of the life to which we each contribute will be built up the greatness of the future—great, we hope and believe, in the realization of Catholic sainthood.

It is with the prayer that readers of this book may embrace the present opportunity for the glory of God and the good of mankind, the writer lets it go forth. For himself he only asks to be remembered by the faithful before God.

J. B.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	INTRODUCTION	1
II	PREPARING FOR THE WAY	10
III	DIVINE GUIDANCE	23
IV	THE TEACHING OF THE HOLY GHOST	37
V	RESTORATION	47
VI	THE HEAVENLY MANNA	59
VII	SATISFACTION AND DESIRE	71
VIII	"SHEW ME THY GLORY"	82
IX	HIDDEN GLORIES	92
X	THE POWER TO BEHOLD	103
XI	THE HOUR OF WEAKNESS	115
XII	DIVINE ATTRIBUTES (I)	126
XIII	DIVINE ATTRIBUTES (II)	140
XIV	ADORATION	152
XV	LIGHT	164

THE SACRED WAY

I

Introduction

"The way of the Lord."—Acts xviii. 25.

"The way of holiness."—Isa. xxxv. 8.

"I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgement."—Prov. viii. 20.

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life."—Ps. xvi. 11.

"The way of life is above to the wise."—Prov. xv. 24.

"I have chosen the way of truth."—Ps. cxix. 30.

"The way of peace."—S. Luke i. 79.

"The way everlasting."—Ps. cxxxix. 24.

THE Sacred Way. We give that name to the hidden way by which the soul attains to Divine knowledge, the heavenly wisdom. It is a secret way, because it is perceived and followed by the soul alone in its relation to God. No one can intrude within its bounds. Teachers and directors may instruct, advise and encourage; but they cannot enter that domain of consciousness wherein the soul knows itself in its single relation to God. It is most truly a secret way; and we shall often be reminded that it is

secret, if not in words yet by the most certain of interior experiences.

It is the "*narrow way*" of the gospel; because it excludes everything which does not serve the purpose of the soul, or assist it in the simple quest of love which is Divine wisdom. It is distinguished from the "broad" way by that plain characteristic, that it leads right on without deviation to its goal. This is not saying there is no opportunity of leaving it when once the soul has entered it; for we know how easy it is to go astray. The pathway of holiness, the track of the Saints, is not a road between impassable barriers, or unbroken fences; but its course is always sufficiently plain to the faithful seeker. We may have our difficult times when, after all our prayers, the way is only dimly discerned; yet, there is light sufficient for the moment. The apparent obscurity is permitted in order to test our faithfulness. Let us trust the light and we shall not miss the way.

It is the way of the Saints, that is, the way by which they reached their present state. They declare the nature of the way. They tell us alike of the joy of progress and the pain of hardship; they tell us of weariness and aridity, and yet again of refreshment and of beauty; they tell us alike of sorrows and of consolation. They tell us how clear and distinct is the path to those who will follow it; but they never for a moment permit us to stray from the fact that it is a spiritual way, a supernatural way, a Divine way. We shall try to follow their teaching, and in particular to trace it in the Holy Scriptures, sometimes by reference to quite isolated sentences wherein the writer has tried to express some

deep thought, or place on record a particular experience of God's love. We shall not unfrequently find in their words a description of our own half-understood experiences, or our own dim perceptions, and struggling thoughts will be defined for us. We shall often feel the wondrous touch of sympathy which makes us one with the Saints in both suffering and aspiration. We have not advanced so very far along the way, but every step is taken upon ground made sacred by some soul's struggle or victory, and sympathy with them is immediately understood. There are saintly and angelic witnesses of our striving,¹ and if we are to our own thinking alone, we are not without the comfort of their prayers. The intercession of the Saints is one of our greatest helps in the way; and the faithful pilgrim will not forget it, nor fail to ask it. If we follow in the way of the Saints, let us rejoice in their fellowship. Let us in our prayer summon them to our side, that together with them we contemplate, and praise, and adore. With them we may offer our voiceless service of love. Believing in their fellowship, the silence we keep with them will be very blessed. Through silence we advance in the pure worship of the spirit.

We shall, then, try to follow the teaching of the Saints, but we shall do so with no idea of limiting it to the few, as though thinking only of an imaginary spiritual aristocracy. Class distinctions are here forgotten; for the Saints of God belong to the whole human family. A true saint may be a hidden, despised person. The Saints know but one law, the law of Divine love, and obedience to that

¹ Heb. xii. 1.

law is possible, no matter what the position and opportunity of an individual in the world. We need to remember this both for ourselves and for others, and in spiritual matters to avoid those distinctions which follow naturally upon worldly considerations. The aureole of sanctity distinguishes alike the slave and the king who have followed the sacred way in simple obedience to Divine love; and the Church that honours S. Peter and S. Paul does not forget her Saints of humbler fame. The mind of the Church in this respect is reflected in the fact that among her greatest are enrolled very many who had no worldly advantage whatever, for "*hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him.*"¹

We shall consider the sacred way as that to which we have been severally called. Seeing that God has called us to be Saints, our clear duty is to learn the truth about the way of the Saints. But we must never forget that although we may acquire much knowledge of this way by intelligent observation and study, the highest, or saving, knowledge is gained only through experience. If we would truly know the way we must walk in it. Let us enter upon our study of it as they whose sole desire is to abide in it, and by the grace of God to pursue it to the end.

Holy Scripture contains much about this sacred way. We will trace it by some of the terms under which it is noticed.

"*The way of the Lord.*" It is the way that leads to God. He is the end. Our pilgrimage is to Him. He is the reward of all our seeking, the object of our

¹ S. James ii, 5; 1 Cor. i. 26-29.

love and its satisfaction. And this not because we have of our own choice given Him this place; but because He Himself, having called us into being, has presented Himself suing for our love,¹ as our Lord said to His Apostles, "*Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.*"² But so wonderful is His love, so infinitely beyond our imagining His gift of Himself to us, that we need to be both guided and purified in our approach to Him. Hence the sacred way which, for all its attractiveness as the way wherein He is found and loved, is yet the way of discipline. It is not the way of illumination and of union except it be in very deed the way of purification.

Here we often stumble in our spiritual life. We are ambitious of spiritual advantages, of peculiar spiritual experiences, and we think that to apply ourselves continually to the ways of penitence, mortification and suffering is not the way for us—surely *we* are called to other things. Never let us make that mistake. No one to whom God gives His richest gifts, on whom He bestows the highest graces, will be found who has not known the harder ways of penitence, mortification, discipline and suffering. And that not because they have been forced into it, but because, seeing the necessity for it, they have willingly yielded themselves to it. They have not necessarily gone out of their way to seek extraordinary means of mortification. Many of the Saints have done so; but no one of them is to be taken as presenting in his life a standard for every one. Each one must seek those means of discipline, mortification and penance which his own case requires. And our first duty is

¹ Cf. Prov. xxiii. 26; 1 S. John iv. 19.

² S. John xv. 16.

to use those which come directly in our way, willingly, lovingly and of set purpose for the purifying of our soul; not with the ulterior motive of seeking extraordinary graces, but that we may become pure in heart. In purity of heart we discern more clearly the leading of our Lord. And, moreover, we perceive that our satisfaction is in Him alone. We want *Him*, not His gifts only. By discipline and mortification we prepare for Him. For this reason also it is called "*the way of holiness*," "*the way of righteousness*." The end of the way is the vision of God; but, without holiness no man shall see Him.¹ It is the way of righteousness, of developing sanctity, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

It is "*the way of life*" clear enough to all whose aims are spiritual. Eternal life is a present fact and not merely a hoped-for attainment. The sacred way is, therefore, the way wherein we realize the fulness and wonder of our possession of life; that is, our life in God, eternal life. That life will be ours most gloriously hereafter if we are faithful here, and do not fail through all our difficulties to "lay hold upon that eternal life to which we are called." All our days spent in the way of life are to be spent in learning the mysteries of that eternal life through the present enjoyment of it. I say deliberately, *enjoyment*, because there is a joy in the realization of this life which is not dependent upon external events, or things of sense. Often the joy is reached through pain and contradiction. It is not a joy dependent upon the changing conditions of the natural life; therefore it remains our own when the last of earthly

¹ Heb. xii, 14.

conditions has been passed. It belongs to eternal life and is itself eternal.

It is "*the way of truth*," for that which is eternal is true, real, abiding. To grasp eternal things is to lay hold upon that which is true. And so in the sacred way we are led always by the light of Divine truth, from the shadow to the substance, from the human to the Divine, from the earthly to the heavenly. How much of our life is spent in learning the truth! Even when we think we know, how much there is yet to be known! The more we advance in the way of truth, the more we own to ourselves that we are profoundly ignorant of the things of God. Our experience in the details of life, our growing apprehension, our developing powers of soul, our quickened intuitions in prayer, our profounder spiritual consciousness, are but evidences of this leading in the way of truth. We fail to understand our own experience of life if we do not perceive it as a leading, a progressive movement in the way of truth.

It is "*the way of peace*." It is not a way wherein is no conflict, for often there rages a long and fierce battle between the soul and its spiritual enemies; often, too, there are attacks, and onslaughts, and threatenings, which compel us to be ceaselessly vigilant. The sacred way is not in that sense one of peace. But the peace of the soul in that way is "*the peace of God which passeth all understanding*,"¹ the peace which Jesus gives,² the peace that is ours when our wills are one with the will of God. "His will is our peace." We may be in this way, and yet it may not be to us "*the way of peace*." Every time

¹ Phil. iv. 7.

² S. John xiv. 27; xvi. 33; Rom. v. 1.

we assert our own will against the will of God we destroy peace within ourselves. The Divine harmony has been disturbed, or broken, and until it is restored we remain without peace. When a loss of peace occurs it is always through some fault on our side. The will of God is the expression towards us of all the love which He bears us, of the purpose which He has eternally purposed towards us, of His tender care at the moment for us. To oppose our own will is to turn aside all that is best for us; it is to lose our hold upon that which is eternal. It is, therefore, in the sense of the peace of God that we have the assurance of being safe in the sacred way. It is for us the way of the Lord, the way of holiness and of righteousness, the way of life and truth, only as we prove it to be to us the way of peace, the way of oneness with the will of God. When we have proved this the sacred way opens to us as "*the way everlasting.*"

This would seem to make this way one of infinite extension. If we think of it as terminating with the passing of the soul in death, we lose much of the holy meaning of our spiritual course. We are not only travelling to the grave. The possession of eternal life is not cut off by any such event as death of the body. As the way of life it is extended beyond the grave; and though in the very nature of things we must leave behind us all that is conditioned by the earth-life, we shall pass into the full glory of life. And being life it must be a state of activity in which we may contemplate the limitless attainment of the children of God.

If this be the truth concerning the sacred way by which we are to journey to God, we have before us

a study of no mean importance. But, it must not be a mere study, a mere turning of the leaves of the book of sacred experience and holy wisdom. We must learn in order to do. Indeed, we shall learn truly only as we try to give effect to every part of that Divine counsel which we expect from the Holy Ghost when we pray Him to inspire us and enlighten us. Guided by Him we shall not fear to look at the truth whether concerning ourselves, or God, the truth revealed in sacred teaching, or in the Divine light which penetrates our souls. Perhaps we shall understand the claims of God as most of all the claims of truth, even when we perceive them as simply the claims of love, or devotion, in some practical matter. And after all the truth of God, the light of God, is co-eternal with His love, yea, in Him they are one. "In all things, therefore, that we have to do let us accustom ourselves always to look at the truth, and to see how the truth looks at all things, and to conform ourselves to this look according to our measure, and to follow very diligently by a keen-sighted gaze the interior pathway to the Highest Good."¹ Love within us is ever urging us to seek the good which we perceive, and that good is God.

O Eternal Father, ever to be adored in Thy love, Who hast set open before us the way of holiness and peace; we humbly entreat Thee so to work in us by Thy grace, that pursuing steadfastly this sacred way we may not fail, but may both advance in holiness, and also abide securely in the peace of Thy blessed will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth for ever. Amen.

¹ Gerlac Petersen.

II

Preparing for the Day

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."—Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."—1 S. John iii. 2, 3.

"I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord."—Ps. xxvi. 6.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."—S. Matt. v. 8.

THE sacred way is wondrously attractive. The goal, even if it be distant, is glorious. As we pause to contemplate our course, and the distances which extend almost infinitely, and are merged in some bright expanse or are lost in the yet more dazzling horizon, we are inclined to move forward rapidly in the expectation of enjoyment and freedom in that which is spread out to our gaze. The spiritual landscape is very beautiful, and its delights appear so near that we may surely with little effort take posses-

sion. So may the hosts of Israel have felt as they left Egypt, and thought of the Promised Land as being not so far away. We know how quickly they passed to the stern discipline of the wilderness way, and were taught in manifold ways the need of being prepared for their possessions in strength of character and spiritual understanding.

The same need is revealed in ourselves as we look right on to the end of the way before us. And we shall be wise if we devote time and thought to the preparation of our hearts. There is often much wasted energy when impetuous souls dash forward, as it were, to seize at once their spiritual inheritance, only to discover their weakness, and at last, humbled and disappointed, to turn again in order to learn the rudiments of that knowledge which is to guide them. God does not, indeed, call us to pursue the sacred way without revealing somewhat of the heavenly glory to which it leads. Sometimes He seems to attract our gaze to vast horizons of spiritual life and beauty. And the natural impulse is to run forward towards them. There will be a time, we believe, when we shall run forward eagerly and securely¹; but not yet. At the very beginning, before we have learnt wisdom, our impulses are often erratic; and in obeying them there is some danger. It is surely safer and wiser to pursue our way with even pace and steadfast gaze; and for that the heart must be prepared. All that God reveals He will confirm to the soul that is faithful in its quest, and patient in pursuit of its end. But for this, I repeat, there is needed a prepared and understanding heart.

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, D.N., Bk. II. xx. 1; Cant. i. 4.

And if, indeed, we have cause to reproach ourselves for any past failure in this respect, let us be humble, and patient in effort to renew our purpose to go forward. It may well be that only through penitence we shall gain the requisite clearness of spiritual vision. But penance is a work of love; and everything that love enjoins will be found to be a step towards the recovery of lost power. Even spiritually minded persons are not free from the dangers of pride and self-sufficiency. There are even many would-be saints in the world whose perfection is by no means assured. They lack humility. They aspire to the hills, and disdain the valleys, forgetting that in humility the soul is made strong for sublime ascents. But in all these considerations it is of ourselves and not of others that we should think first. What is the testimony of conscience? Have we been careful to preserve readiness of soul wherewith to meet the varying demands of the spiritual life? Are we convicted through weakness of some past negligence, or presumption? Are we ignorant of the ways of God because we have thought little of knowing ourselves? Some of His most loving and tender dealings with ourselves are to be understood only through a simple self-knowledge, and the right use of everyday spiritual experiences. No one can afford to neglect such matters as these; and often it would help us if we would go back upon such simple details in order to renew the soul's intention, and to quicken its love.

What is required of us before we can be assured of safety in the sacred way? "*Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?*"

*He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart ; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."*¹ We need to be pure in inward and outward life. It not only stands as the primary need of those who would tread the sacred way : it is, in its effect upon the soul, the power, or interior grace, by which they proceed. Without it there is no clearness of spiritual vision. The outlook is distorted, or blurred, to one who is stained with sin and exalted in pride. We have experience of this whenever the consciousness of sin impedes the action of the spirit in prayer and aspiration. We know how blessed is the restoration of power through penance. Thus we acknowledge the truth. But we should do more than this. It is not sufficient to do homage to a fundamental truth by an occasional, or forced, acknowledgement. It should be never lost sight of ; but always given its rightful place in the scheme of spiritual life. How much trouble and pain might have been avoided if in humility we had always been careful about this one thing : purity of soul, of will, of motive. How much more ready for spiritual advance we should have been if pride in some of its myriad forms had not been allowed a place in our hearts. We can see it all so plainly to-day, with some spiritual failure fresh in our minds, or a depressing hopelessness haunting us, or some secret self-condemnation sounding within us a bitter, torturing reproach. It is all so plain to us ; what, then, is it to God against Whom we have sinned ? "*Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.*"²

There may be in our hearts a yet sadder, and more

¹ Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.

² Ps. xc. 8.

deeply painful consciousness. We may have lost our first love. The sacred way which was once attractive is now dull and uninteresting. We no longer aspire to the heights to which it leads, but are content—perhaps despairingly content—with religious routine, with services without fervour, with prayer without devotion, with Communions without love. Is any condition more sad, or more appealing? It should appeal strongly to all in whom there burns the flame of Divine love, even as it appeals to the Sacred Heart of the Beloved. How tenderly He speaks to the Christians of Ephesus.¹ He remembers all their good works, their labour, their patience, their zeal in uprooting heresy, and commends them; and yet there is that which grieves Him. “*Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*” But their case is not hopeless. Divine love has ever something to offer. There is always the way open to restoration for those who will be humble and self-forgetting. “*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*” The way is set open, but not without warning to all who will not avail themselves of it. And surely the promise is all we could ask. It is the fulfilment of all the hope of life in the Paradise of God. It is the giving back of all we seem to have lost.

What an opportunity is thus presented to the humble and contrite soul. The sacred way is once again beautiful in the light of the promise of Jesus.

¹ Rev. ii. 1, 7.

And who that is to-day feeling the sadness, the misery, of lost love will not be encouraged to begin again? May He who has shown so great compassion, give also the grace whereby we may make the effort. Shall we recognize that He still loves and longs for our love, and not make the effort? Shall we deny His love because we are miserable in our own unlove? Shall not His love the rather re-kindle our own, and renew our hope and make us strong for the first steps? The misery of unlove in any soul is never to be regarded as a contradiction of the love of God. Sometimes in their utter wretchedness such souls can hardly accept the fact that God does love; because in their distress they seem unable to believe anything which is not an extension of their own misery. But they should persist in looking not downwards into their own griefs, but upwards to God in persevering hopefulness.

Let us for a moment or two contemplate the end of the way, the consummation of our hopes. How beautiful it is, how full of joy! The soul, after traversing the sacred way, is attuned to divinest joy, and responds through its own developed fitness to all that is joy-making in the life to which it has been guided. What awaits us there? The Vision of God! *We shall see God! We shall look into the glorious face of our Lord Beloved! We shall know that joy which is the fruit of patient, persevering love!* And yet—shall we, indeed, know this? Dare we expect it? Yes, we dare look forward to it while our hearts are true, while our wills are fixed in union with the will of God, and while we are fulfilling the conditions laid down for us.

Let us hear S. John, the beloved Apostle: "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.*"¹ "*Sons of God,*" or rather, "*children of God,*" we have a "community of nature with the prospect of development." The love which the Father hath given, imparted to us, is the principle of this development; and the end in view is the vision of God. Our spiritual development is towards that likeness to our Lord which is the condition of vision; and again that likeness to Him will be the consequence of vision.² And S. John says: "*And every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.*"

Here the Apostle speaks to us as a wise guide of souls. His words are carefully chosen to meet the deep spiritual need which is felt by loving souls in their aspirations. Longing for the reality of most pure interior life, and setting before themselves no lower standard than is implied in the promised vision of God, they are sensitive, anxious, to a degree beyond the understanding of unspiritual observers. S. John helps them to understand themselves, and declares that spiritual standard which they are keeping in view to be the true one. "*Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself.*" The purity here indicated is personal, internal, and not a matter of simple cleanness. The word employed "suggests the notion of shrinking from contamination, of a

¹ 1 S. John iii. 2, 3.

² Cf. Westcott, *The Epistle of S. John*, pp. 95-101.

delicate sensibility to pollution of any kind." A certain cleanness may result from "the application of some outward means"; but this desired purity "comes as the result of an inward effort."

At this point we are brought, as it were, face to face with ourselves. There must be this inward effort if we would run the way before us in security. We must purify ourselves. That is, we must take our full share in harmony with the purpose of God. The Apostle is certainly not forgetting the part which belongs to God alone in this purifying work; for already in the beginning of his Epistle he has said, "*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.*"¹ And again: "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"² We may compare with this that saying of S. Paul: "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*"³ God's work proceeds along with our own; and all our inward effort must be made in the full consciousness of His Divine operation.

What must I do? That is the natural question when the soul perceives its state, and realizes the call to action. "*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*"⁴ This should be no despairing cry, but a true prayer rising from the heart in which love is working, and inspiring to action. The hour is fraught with eternal consequences. Dimly we perceive them through the confusion of our mistakes, our follies and our sins. The sacred way is before us, but we are

¹ 1 S. John i. 7.

³ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

² 1 S. John i. 9.

⁴ Acts ix. 6.

weighted, and hindered, and blinded; there is so much that needs to be done; where shall we begin? Every thought as we pursue it leads only to fresh realization of interior difficulty. The effort to purify ourselves requires not only strength, but also a certain clearness and directness of aim; and we think we have neither the power nor the wisdom to go forward. Yes, in the hour of our awakening the light which attracts us to the sacred way reveals most painfully the confusion, moral and spiritual, of our life. If we have lost our first love, then the pain and misery are so much worse, because there is the added consciousness that we have sinned against love—the very love which even now is the most evident of all truths to us. “*Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.*”¹

But it is still the fact that we are the children of God; and for that very reason we dare not give place to doubt or despair. Let us by all means understand the sins, hiding nothing, but for all the evil, open or secret, as we perceive and know it before God, make a true offering of contrition. To do penance is the first call of spiritual duty; it is that to which we are urged by every impulse of contrite love. The cleansing of the soul clears the spiritual vision, and brings order out of the confusion to which we awakened. The pardoned soul will understand the work which remains. It is that work of the soul within its own secret life which S. John implies by His words: “*He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself.*”

¹ S. Luke xv. 21.

And the Holy Ghost will teach us. Let us, contrite but pardoned, humble but loving, contemplate the hope set before us. We hope for the Vision of God, we hope to look upon the Face of Jesus; we hope with Him to rest in the Bosom of the Father. Let us contemplate all this in the calmness of love growing steadily towards the holiest determination. Humbly, not trusting ourselves, but holding to the love which moment by moment becomes more certain in penetrating power, we can determine with ourselves that no longer shall any other love bind us. We can renew our self-oblation and surrender; and indeed before we can be quite ready for the certain return of temptations, and re-appearance of attractions of various kinds, we ought to make a definite surrender of ourselves to the only love that is worthy of that homage. There will come days of temptation and difficulty when we shall be sorely tried; and then we shall realize that through surrender to the Beloved we have attained to greater safety. Everything, even the legitimate claim of natural affection, takes its rightful place in relation to the superlative claims of Divine love. We feel the difference effected by our act of surrender. When old likings and motions of self-love re-awaken to cause us trouble, it is so much easier to practise mortification. In cutting off occasions of sin, or indulgence of self, we have a definite motive. Love moves us; and He who has accepted our love keeps it so long as we show that we are faithfully guarding it for Him.

We must be prepared to find yet deeper needs within ourselves as we advance. Even the early

steps in the sacred way lead to wonderful discoveries in the spiritual life; and perhaps the most important is that light of truth wherein we discern the secret imperfections of our souls. These have to be dealt with in the same spirit of loyalty to the Beloved. Acts of interior mortification; hidden, but resolute, conflicts; spiritual suffering silently borne; all these in ever-changing form keep us alive to the issues set before us, which can be made certain only through determined love. But if we desire that holy inward purity which is our fitness for the vision of God, and by the secret revelations of Divine love are encouraged to aspire to it, we shall not be afraid to suffer. Indeed, God is wont to assist the struggling soul most wonderfully in His tender care for it. Through all the pain, through all the loneliness, there comes the assurance of supporting love, and not for the fleeting gratification of sense would we barter the peace which we find. It is peace within all the signs and acts of our spiritual warfare. It is the peace of the soul which knows itself to be loved, and who in the power of that love is growing in response to sanctifying grace.

We might suppose that to taste only of this sweet interior peace would suffice to make a soul brave and ready to endure all things, however hard, that he might not lose the promised vision. But experience shows how quickly we may be discouraged. The difficulties of the way are so real, so evident, and the end is so far off; we lose heart. We forget how often the Saints have suffered in the same way. Let us encourage ourselves by the remembrance of their triumphs. And, above all, let us hear the

voice of the Beloved Himself. S. John had heard that voice long before he wrote his word of direction. Behind all his words was the living voice of Jesus, who now speaks to us: "*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*"¹ There is the promise of the vision. He speaks to us in our failure, in our wavering, our aspirations. In our failure to rouse us to a sense of all we are forfeiting; in our wavering to brace us to holy endeavour; in our aspirations to bless and confirm the soul in its aims. "*They shall see God.*" It is the highest reward and crown of love that we can desire. To see God! To be able to bear the "weight" of that glory into which the pure soul will be taken! What wondrous strength is his whose heart is pure! Often-times as we proceed along the sacred way we may prove this; for He who will be Himself the glory of His redeemed will even here make known Himself as the soul is able to bear it. And always it will be when in pureness we have risen in love to Him, or rather, when, finding us steadfast in the love of purity He raises us, and reveals some deep truth concerning Himself. Later we may learn more of this. For the present let us desire to be so firmly established in the way, that nothing of earth may avail to distract us, or divert our minds from the desired end—the Vision of God.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who to the pure in heart hast given assurance of the vision of Thy Divine majesty; awaken in us we pray Thee such ardent desires of love, that longing after Thee and pursuing our way in hope

¹ S. Matt. v. 8.

of Thy glorious appearing, we may by the help of Thy grace so purify our hearts from all that is contrary to Thy love, that we may be found ready for the fulfilment of Thy promise; Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest One God world without end. Amen.

III

Divine Guidance

"Shew me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation."—Ps. xxv. 4, 5.

"Thou shalt shew me the path of life."—Ps. xvi. 11.

"O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles."—Ps. xliii. 3.

"Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."—Isa. xlviii. 17.

"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."—Ps. lxxiii. 24.

"Thy right hand hath holden me up, and Thy gentleness hath made me great."—Ps. xviii. 35.

"His way is perfect."—Ps. xviii. 30.

UNDERSTANDING of the Divine guidance of the soul in the sacred way is attained through experience. Although very much has been said and written about it, it remains unintelligible to us until we approach it through our own individual experiences; and then

we discover that there is nothing new in spiritual experience, but that all who are in the way are guided and disciplined after the same manner. Holy Scripture and the writings of the Saints bear witness continuously to this fact. The Saints interpret their own experiences by the certain key of Holy Scripture; and while we accept their teaching we find ourselves led back again and again to some pregnant passage, some inspired word, for confirmation. The Bible becomes a record of life. We mark the struggles and aspirations of souls; we almost hear their cries, revealing both their longing and their patience; we read in some brief sentence, so short that we might easily pass it by, the story of a great interior trial through which a soul has been taught and guided in the way. And as a faithful record of human life the Bible becomes to us a mirror wherein we behold ourselves, and discover the secret of God's dealing with us.

God guides the faithful soul not by precepts only; not by manifold directions merely; though these are not wanting for the common ordering of the spiritual life. Indeed they are many and often minute, and we cannot pretend that our life as His children is as it should be if we disregard them. Every precept, every rule of conduct, is directed to the ultimate perfection of our relation to God as His children; and our obedience is a matter of love. There is no hardness, as in mere servitude; but restfulness and joy, because everything that is required of us is adapted as the means of loving expression of devotion to our Father. How happy we should be if always in love we could anticipate the

call of obedience. The sacred way would quickly become delightful, and spiritual progress would be assured. But we know how unready we are, how inclined to self-will, and self-pleasing, when the call to interior spiritual obedience is clear. But we suffer for our fault; and are compelled to learn through experience of pain the very things we might have learned, if we had had the will to learn, in the easier ways of love. It is true, as the Psalmist expresses it, that we do not run securely in the way of God's commandments before we have through discipline attained to a certain spiritual liberty. "*I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou shalt enlarge my heart.*"¹ Again, this liberty is assured to the faithful whose obedience is a matter of earnest devotion: "*I will walk at liberty (or, at large) for I seek Thy precepts.*"² This is more particularly true of later experience;³ but we begin to prove it somewhat earlier, as we begin to take account of our trials and the secret indications of God's leading.

If it be true that the sacred way is clear and direct to the pilgrim soul, why do we find the Saints so constant and insistent in their prayer for guidance? "*Shew me Thy way.*" "*Lead me in Thy truth.*" "*Thou shalt shew me the path of life.*" "*O send out Thy light and Thy truth that they may lead me.*" Thus do they cry in their prayer; and the reason is to be found in their understanding of their deep personal need. It is because the way is obscure to the unaided soul. Unless we are spiritually illumined we cannot

¹ Ps. cxix. 32.

² Ps. cxix. 45.

³ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, D.N., Bk. II. xx.

mark our course through the manifold difficulties which beset us; for they confuse and even bewilder the soul and cloud its vision. We need the Divine light whereby we see our way. Often it is by the interior ray of this light alone that we are able to discern the path; and only by inner attention at all times can we grow accustomed to that light and learn obedience in following it. This is the sure light of the sacred way; if other lights attract us we must not heed them. For all their brilliancy they will quickly pass; this alone remains, directing us always to the highest spiritual ends. But what is that light if it be not Divine, seeing it is within us the fulfilment of our Lord's Own word: "*I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life*"? ¹ The light is not always interiorly clear, or unclouded; but it is always sufficient for immediate guidance, if we have faith to follow it. We may always be sure of our next step.

We need to dispose ourselves aright that we do not fail of the Divine guidance. In the common affairs of daily life we learn from experience. We make our plans, and fashion our lives with due regard to those happenings which most directly affect us. Nor are we indifferent to the accumulated wisdom of the ages. It is impossible to say how much of it has been worked into the commonplaces of daily life. But there are also degrees of practical wisdom which each must acquire through personal experience. How much we learn through our mistakes, our failures, our successes and achievements.

¹ S. John viii. 12.

In truth there is nothing that enters into our ordinary life which does not in some way contribute to that sum of wisdom with which we approach the questions and problems of everyday life. How all these things may be sanctified and made subservient to the higher and eternal interest of the individual is one of the first concerns of the spiritual life. Religion to be true must embrace all that is included in the term "life" as we understand it of ourselves.

The spiritual life, the practice of religion, is not a thing wholly apart, or separated and confined within the narrow limits of a mere part of our conscious life. It is intimately mixed up with all that we call secular business, social obligations, and personal intercourse of every degree. This is not to lower the conception of religion; but to raise the tone of life generally. The spiritual life must be lived with definite intention. It is to rule all other elements of our complex life. It is the life of the soul pursuing its Godward way. And yet not in independence of the body. The soul has to raise the body, in a way to spiritualize it and all that we require of it. The soul has to pursue its way towards its own realized perfection of life. The soul, to be perfectly happy, needs God. Hence its aspirations, and all the pure happiness which results. We must seek union with God if we are to be happy, and do our duty, not only to the body, but also, through the body, to all who are naturally associated with us.

Therefore through all that makes up the life of body or soul, all that is included in sensible or spiritual experience, is to be used as means to the perfect knowledge of the way—the Holy Spirit guiding us.

Life in the sacred way is thus at all times full of immediate and living interest. No greater mistake is ever made concerning Catholic religion than by those who persist in regarding it as uninteresting, and lacking in those things which appeal to the virility of the human soul. Response to the Holy Spirit is a matter requiring great interior strength. His directions and demands appear at times impossible. He seems to speak within the soul in utter disregard of its weakness. But that is not really so, because He would have us confident in the Divine assurance : "*My grace is sufficient for thee : for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*"¹ How lofty and wonderful His guidance is, while leading to the perfecting of Divine strength in us, prevailing over our weakness, is to be learned and proved by the soul in the sacred way.

"*Shew me Thy way.*" "*O send out Thy light and Thy truth : let them lead me.*" That should be our prayer in every time of temptation ; and we should *expect* the answer. God will not disappoint us. "*Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel ; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.*" Sometimes, however, through weakness of faith and forgetfulness of the Divine assurance, we make the mistake of praying and expecting nothing ; but in so doing we both dishonour God and weaken our own faith. Temptation tends to confusion, though the danger is less than we fear ; for while our hearts are set on God, and consent to sin is consistently refused ; while we rely with all the confidence of love

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

upon God, Whose aid we have sought, we may be calm and strong. We shall learn very much in the way of holy wisdom, while growing stronger through spiritual exercises. *"In the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul."*¹

And, first, through our experience of temptations which appeal to us through the senses. The sensitive faculties are keen, and unless wisely controlled and mortified they assume the governing power in the man. Temptation in the spiritual part, as distinct from the region of the senses, is in such cases hardly, if at all, appreciated; while, on the other hand, the spiritual trials become greater as the senses are controlled. At the beginning of the sacred way we may suffer chiefly from the lower class of temptations, though not free from many painful spiritual trials. But think now only of the former.

Consider how many they are. We are tempted to pleasures, indulgences, not always to excesses, in ways which appear easy and natural, agreeable and harmless; or we are moved in ways of self-seeking to secure some distinction, praise, esteem; or we are inclined to censoriousness, detracting speeches, and open uncharitableness; or we yield to selfish thoughts and become bitter, complaining, dissatisfied, restless. And we might add to this list of possible temptations out of our own experience. We could tell, perhaps, of other forms of evil suggestion, pride, malice, and ill will, which the enemy employs to draw away our thoughts from God and centre them in ourselves. Is it not so? Is not the enemy busy with us in this

¹ Ps. cxxxviii. 3.

way from time to time? But there is something else which is rather like self-conviction in us. We seek to justify our conduct, to excuse ourselves. But true and right conduct, holy and pure thoughts, need no justification. We really condemn ourselves when we attempt to justify ourselves.

But look deeper yet. When the mood passes, and the mind turns to holier things; when we begin to pray and make acts of love; do we not at once feel weak, and know that we have sinned? Yes, and the pain of that hour may be very penetrating and very bitter. We are out of touch with God, and all through our own fault. We must repent, and be renewed through the absolving mercy of God. And then with truer vision we can take account of the dangers from which He has delivered us. We have deviated from the sacred way. We must return and humbly submit to the Holy Spirit, Who through our mistakes and sinful failures will show again the safe pathway. With contrite love let us go forward and He will quicken our footsteps.

It will be well to notice here that the grace of Absolution should become effectual in contrite love. We shall then be courageous, and brightly hopeful, though humble; for true humility is not a dull virtue, it does not inspire those morbid misgivings which trouble some souls. The absolved soul must face away from the contemplation of its own wanderings. We have no time to waste upon them. All our powers, all our love, are required for the higher and gladder work of marking and following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual temptations affect us more in the secret

ways of communion with God. We have grown weary of spiritual exercises, have lost interest, and even have drifted in a helpless kind of way until we have fallen into the dangerous sin of accidie; or we are afraid before the certain trials of the spirit in prayer, and are sorely tempted to give up the struggle and be content with a lower standard, not remembering that the first backward step is the beginning of a downward course; or again we are tormented with persistent and even horrible temptations which seem to sully and defile the very spring of life, and we long to escape, afraid that we have made a mistake, that such temptations surely imply some radical unfitness for spiritual attainment, perhaps even the loss of Divine favour. But such is not really the case with us. We forget, in our misery, the warnings and assurances of the Saints: warnings, that we may not be unprepared; and assurances, that we should not lose hope, or confidence in the call of God. All such trials are of the nature of proof that our course is the right one, rather than of anything to the contrary.¹ “*We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom.*”²

When we are subjected to any spiritual trial, let us betake ourselves to God without delay. Our first impulse should be one of love. We must be true to Him at all cost to ourselves. He alone can guide us and make plain the pathway before us. It is a time not for hasty action, but of measured conduct, as we go forward step by step in faith. We are not concerned so much about escape from the

¹ Cf. Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, xxiv. 3.

² Acts xiv. 22.

trial, as faithfulness to the Divine leading. By the same interior light which guides us in obedience to love, we perceive also the straightly defined way of perfection.

If we have ever truly understood the secret of love in the Passion of our Lord, we ought not to be discouraged at the prospect of our own suffering. Rather should the fact that we are to be conformed to His likeness through the cross inspire us to heroic efforts of love. The cross is ever prominent in the path of perfection, and the faithful disciple will know it as the symbol of safety and of victory. There is a certain joy of the Holy Ghost in all this. His guidance is manifest. He is not only making the way plain to us, but also imparting His own gift of Divine Counsel. We know the way, and we understand the reason of those interior demands which He makes upon our love and faith. Obedience to the Holy Ghost is always accompanied by growing clearness of spiritual vision. We are glad when we obey. We are content to be guided by Him in the present, and to wait for the glory which will follow. "*Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and after that receive me to glory.*" There is holy restfulness for the soul that abides and walks in the counsel of the Holy Ghost. It raises the whole life above the changeful moods of self-love and pride. If it be oftentimes the way of humility, of suffering, of sacrifice, it is yet the more wondrously restful as we are brought through our own nothingness to absolute dependence upon God. To be at rest from the warring of selfish claims in the pure love of the Holy Ghost—what a prospect of peace for us who may be

tormented through our own waywardness and resistance to spiritual control. It should be a matter of concern to us all whether we may not have erred through independence in our spiritual life. We need a guide in the sacred way—the Holy Spirit, the interior guide, and under Him a wise director; and obedience to the Holy Spirit will include obedience to the director. This is a question for the individual conscience. Some masters of the spiritual life declare that perfection in the individual is not possible where there is not authoritative direction, and consequently no rule of obedience. It is a matter for careful thought and decision.

There is joy for the soul to whom it is given to discern the way. It is not an emotional joy, but rather an inspiring joy. It inspires with holier thoughts and higher hopes for the way before us. It exalts us to holy courage, and develops within us the virtue of fortitude, as we contemplate the certain dangers and sufferings which await us, and prepare ourselves for spiritual undertakings. We need all courage for those efforts, often more hidden than apparent, by which alone we can rightly respond to the guidance of the Holy Ghost. But having discerned the way, let us pursue it with pure intention. Love delights in hidden service, and in this we shall need all the strong motive of love, for the greatest of our efforts must be directed to the accomplishment of the purpose of God in the inner man. It is not easy to be strict with ourselves, to be interiorly mortified, to be faithful to the Holy Ghost, and deaf to the seductive voices around us. But the sacred way cannot be followed if we do not

perceive that it is no other than the way of the Cross.

But let none suppose that the joy we have spoken of is denied to them; or that for them there must certainly be sadness in the way. There is no sadness for any one who knows that God is leading. He makes a way to joy through the very difficulty. How is this? In every difficulty there is an appeal, a call of love to love, the Divine love to human love, the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the heart of the pilgrim. There is no sadness in that call, and there should be none in our response, but rather holy exhilaration. And not the least of all cheering facts of life in the sacred way is the fellowship and encouragement of the Saints. They know all the difficulties, but they never fail to encourage. They know how sadness weakens the soul, and deprives it of Divine graces. They would warn us against this and raise us to holier energy.¹ If we will take their word, and also pray for spiritual joy we shall not be disappointed.

This is important. Depression may follow upon contemplation of ourselves. We then make our own pain; and perhaps go on in contemplation of the pain, and begin to envy others whose joy of soul is apparent. But if we would persevere in holy aspiration we should rise above all such dangers to find the joy of the spiritual life in simple loving trustfulness. Afterwards we shall know and gratefully confess that God Himself has directed us in the way. "*Thy right hand hath holden me up, and Thy gentleness hath made me great.*" The Prayer Book version reads: "*Thy loving correction hath*

¹ Cf. Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, xxiv. 29.

made me great." It completes the thought for us. Through all the Divine leading and discipline there is the simple thought and evidence of love. The Holy Ghost is infinitely tender and gentle in His dealing with us. When we look back upon the way which to us has been hard and rugged, it is not the pain that we remember so much as the gentleness of God. We know now how strong was His hand as He guided us, but at the time we were constrained by His tenderness; if the pain was great it was never needlessly severe, and we know it now in the deep and sweet consciousness of spiritual greatness, not our own but His. He invests the soul whom His grace has exalted. He glorifies the soul in whom His love is victorious.

We confess to the perfection of the way. "*His way is perfect.*" No human wisdom could trace a course so entirely consistent with our nature. Truly a sacred way. The soul's deepest sensibilities and susceptibilities are tested and trained; its holiest desires directed and purified; its whole being is brought within the immediate working of the Holy Ghost. Every step is sacred, because Divine love has ordered it, and Divine grace sanctifies it. Oh, we lose much when we yield to our feelings and are "*discouraged because of the way.*"¹ But it is the right way, and while above it the Cross of Jesus stands, the Divine symbol of healing and of power,² the sacred way has nothing of terror for the soul that loves.

Through all the trials that may come in the ways through which we are being tested, we are to

¹ Num. xxi. 4.

² S. John iii. 14, 15.

look for the guiding of the Holy Ghost. If we look lovingly, we shall find *His* way. We must not look for the easiest path, nor seek to go round difficulties. Often the sure way of love is to go straight through them, and by so doing we find love as a power forcing the way. The Holy Spirit will never leave us till He has accomplished His good purpose for us, and we must yield ourselves in fullest self-oblation to His guidance.

O Lord God, Who hast called us and set our feet in the way that leadeth to everlasting life; Grant us, we beseech Thee, the continued guidance and inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit that we faint not through discouragement, nor wander from the path through vanity and self-will; may we so obey His voice that we may joyfully confess to the perfection of Thy way; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the Unity of the same Holy Spirit, now and ever. Amen.

IV

The Teaching of the Holy Ghost

"The words of the Lord are pure words : as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."—Ps. xii. 6.

"The word of the Lord is tried."—Ps. xviii. 30.

"He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths."—Isa. ii. 3.

"Thou, which hath shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth."—Ps. lxxi. 20.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him ; and He will shew them His covenant."—Ps. xxv. 14.

THE Holy Ghost is our Teacher in all that we are required to know for the right ordering of life in the sacred way. The authoritative teaching of the Church is none other than His own, for He abides in the Church. Through the Church He declares what is of faith. The Catholic Creeds are recognized as His declaration through the Ecumenical Councils. The Holy Scriptures are given by His inspiration, and He has committed them to the guardianship of the Church, through which He interprets them for the instruction and guidance of the faithful. The Holy Ghost further teaches us through the con-

science which in every one is the faculty of spiritual discernment. Howsoever we receive Divine truth, whether through the Church, or through the conscience, we receive it from the Holy Ghost. In every rightly ordered life the teaching of the Holy Ghost is very clear and definite; there is no confusion and no contradiction. His teaching through the conscience will be found always consistent with the truth of the Catholic Faith. All that He teaches the soul through experience will be found in harmony with the testimony of the Saints. Thus the whole expression of Catholic thought is simple and coherent, and also continuous. There is no change in it, because it is of the Holy Ghost; and God cannot change. And here it should be noted that in taking this position we do not deny the possibility, and even the necessity, of development. Development is not change, because there is in it no necessary casting away of any part of the truth. In true Catholic development there is always a retention of all that is essential; it is only directed to higher ends.

In trying to understand the teaching of the Holy Ghost within the sacred way we shall remember the unity of that teaching in the spiritual history of mankind. It is in the light of His continuous teaching that we may best learn the meaning of our own spiritual experience. And first of all we should consider the nature of the Divine word and teaching. If we are to respect it, obey it, love it, we must have undoubted reasons for so doing. It is not enough that we accept it without question, because it is authoritative. That the Divine word uttered by the Holy Ghost may not return to Him void, there

is needed on our part a certain condition of receptivity; our will to receive must be in unison with the Will that speaks: in other words, we must be in a state of love.

This is required because of the very nature of the Divine word. "*The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.*" This is mystically the declaration that the words of God are the words of pure love. Especially does this refer to the Faith, for mystically silver signifies faith.¹ But the Faith of the Church centres in the doctrine of the Incarnation, obscurely hinted at in the words "*a furnace of earth,*" for our Incarnate Lord was, as it were, consumed in the fire of His love. All His words are words of Divine love, the intensity of which is here declared. "*Purified seven times*"; that is, perfectly pure, the number seven signifying perfection. So then all the words of the Holy Ghost come to us out of the fire of Divine love; they are to be received into the human heart prepared in love. Where there is this required preparedness, there is spiritual illumination: "*the entrance of Thy words giveth light.*"² Mutual love between the soul and God constitutes true preparedness for the reception of the word into the heart; and the more simply we receive it in love, the more clear and wonderful is that light which glows within the soul.

If we hold fast to the truth of all this we shall experience none of that discouragement which so often precedes failure in the day of discipline and

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, Spiritual Canticle, xii. 3.

² Ps. cxix. 130.

trial. Rather we shall know that through everything the Holy Ghost is guiding by love, and be ourselves ready with the response of love. "*He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.*"

But, it may be urged, such assurance often comes late. We learn only after many failures this truth of Divine guidance. We are, as it were, forced into it through the deep sense of spiritual disadvantage. That is true, we own, in not a few instances; but it would not be so true if we were humbler in spirit, more ready to be guided, and more obedient to direction. In the sacred way we cannot dispense with the knowledge that others have gained through suffering and temptation, and above all through patience, which is so remarkable in the Saints that it is celebrated in Heaven itself: "*here is the patience and the faith of the Saints.*"¹ The inexperienced are often over confident in themselves, and trust to their own wisdom; but a little humility would save them from much after pain. Perhaps we do not like the idea of revealing our spiritual trials to another—he might not understand. Quite so; but that does not justify our self-confidence. We seek, even through the human agent, the teaching of the Holy Ghost; and if we are simple hearted and faithful He will not disappoint us.

Manifold are the experiences through which the Holy Ghost will teach us. Indeed, we ought to learn under His guidance from every one of them, both exterior and interior. If we would approach everything that affects us in life with the primary

¹ Rev. xiii. 10; xiv. 12.

object of discovering its spiritual value, we should not be so easily depressed; none of the happenings of life would really discourage us; rather should we see in them the manifest working of God, Who is thereby directing our souls to some necessary action in the sacred way. Because we are in the way, every step should lead to deeper knowledge, and every experience should mark a step. We need only to think of the most ordinary experiences to assure ourselves that the Holy Ghost is working for our advancement. Thus, we notice the changing circumstances of our lives, the troubles, sickness, bereavements and sorrows, from which no one is wholly free. Or we think of discouragements, failure of plans, fruitless efforts, loss of reputation, evil report, misrepresentation, calumny. Or, yet again, of more interior trials of spirit, the suffering of the soul through the difficulties we experience in prayer; or the secret discipline whereby we are detached from the things of time and sense, and purified in the several powers of the soul; or the loneliness and desolation into which we have been brought. All these are but the common experience of devout souls, through which so many have been advanced in sanctity, and even exalted in spirit. We cannot escape them; nay, we even meet them, almost attract them to us if we are steadfast in the sacred way. There is no immunity for the faithful soul. "But alas! what life is this, where no trouble or misery wanteth, where also every place is full of snares and of mortal enemies! For one trouble or temptation going away another cometh; and the first conflict yet during, many others suddenly rise, more than can be thought."

How often might we thus utter our complaint under the stress of life's difficulties ! But we must never stay at the point of complaining, and encourage the habit of grumbling. He who complains willingly abides in his own weakness. He contemplates his distresses, while every moment he wastes his energy, and diminishes the gift of Divine grace whereby he might rise in devotion, and pursue his way in the strength of God. If we but remember that the sacred way is no other than the way of the Cross, we shall rather be inspired by the great example of our Lord in His Passion. To Him every pain of that dark experience was but a step in the way of love, a necessity as He pressed on to the consummation. In like manner we are to regard all the trials of our way as means to an end. The love which triumphed on Calvary, will triumph again in us if we are brave enough to meet the certain pain. If instead of regarding the cost to ourselves, we would always seek to realize some further possibility of love we should not be so alarmed by the accentuation, or even accumulation of pains. Not one by itself, nor many in combination, may be despised or neglected. Nothing can come to us without spiritual significance. We are to observe the Divine ordering, and desire the Divine teaching under all circumstances. We shall not be disappointed. The Holy Spirit will not fail to enlighten the willing soul ; and we shall rejoice in giving Him praise.

But let us confidently *expect* the assistance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, and wait humbly for it ; yes, and with deep reverence for His Person, and profound thought of His power. There is a way of

speaking of the Holy Spirit and His gifts which betrays a great lack of understanding, and is altogether too light and casual in tone. They in whom this is evident know not "at what a cost they misuse the name, and lower in themselves the power of the thought, of the presence of the Eternal God."¹ We ought then to respond to His teaching with deepest reverence for His person and authority; and then how beautiful is His word to us. It is the seven-times purified word of Eternal Love. However great the demand, how lofty soever the appeal, the essential beauty will grow for us through all the dreaded hardness of the way, yea, even through the terrors of the Cross. We shall know it is love and find within ourselves the power to make an adequate response. If we are true we shall never say, when called to respond, "*I cannot do this*," but rather, because we have the power, begin at once to exercise the will.

How is this response to be made? Not only in general ways of love, for they tend to indefiniteness. In the sacred way our steps must be taken in strength, and that is the same as saying our acts of love, our response to the Holy Spirit should be clearly defined. There is much weakness in Christian practice which is to be traced to no other cause than a too easy generalization in the sacred work of love. Response to the Holy Spirit of love should be more than this. He comes to us often with some particular demand, or with some clear direction. If He find us prepared in will and ready to obey, He will not fail to direct us; "*He will teach us of His ways*,"² and open out

¹ Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, p. 159.

² Isa. ii. 3.

some clearer vision, or instruct us through some experience which may well appear to us as wholly beyond anything we have dared to expect. It may be we are conscious of failure in some important matter of the spiritual life; we are penitent, we are moved to contrite longing to amend and return to the higher path which for the time we have forsaken. We are renewed in will. It is then that the Holy Spirit will direct our thoughts, and lead us to contemplation of a most encouraging prospect. He will cheer us with unwonted glimpses of sublime ascents, and alluring distances in the sacred way. The marvel to us is that they should be given at the very time of our humiliation, when we are so painfully conscious of our shortcomings. The reason for this is found in the preparedness of the will in the individual, and in the love whereby God seeks to confirm the soul in some high and pure intention: in short, to teach it through love.

I think this experience, which is wholly interior, would be more often ours if we were more entirely consistent in our desire for the inward teaching of the Holy Ghost, and prompt in response. When His word is understood we should answer directly to the demand, or inner direction which is conveyed. We should respond in obedient love. If a course is clearly shown, take it; if a sacrifice is called for, make it; but always as our immediate reply to Him. The result will be found in something beyond the mere fulfilment of some holy purpose, something more satisfying than the bare keeping of a resolution. We have not looked in vain to the heights, or the distances, with their attractive beauty; we have

advanced towards them and already begin to possess them. What does this mean to the ardent soul? It means deepened knowledge of the ways of God, an advance in the practice of the virtues, and a certain preparedness for the graces of the sacred way.

If thus we are taught by the Holy Spirit in days of penitence, how much more may we not expect to receive when the will is wholly surrendered, and the soul prepared in love! We know from the testimony of the Saints, and from our masters in the spiritual life, how wonderful and intimate it may be; and all they tell us is amply borne out by our own experience. There is no experience, nothing of all that may overtake us by the way, or come to us with the days, that the Holy Spirit cannot use in His Divine work of teaching the soul. Our knowledge of spiritual things is never acquired merely by study, or through ordinary human channels of instruction. There is always that which has become our own through wholly interior means. And we can even determine to some extent the stages of that interior education. They are associated in our minds with seasons of grace and spiritual illumination. They are linked to sacred memories which can never be separated from our understanding of life. In other words, we know we were inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit.

A holy confidence succeeds to every experience of this teaching of the Holy Ghost. The sacred Scriptures, the wisdom of the Saints, and the voice of the Church appeal to us with added power because through our experience we are in closer sympathy with their essential truth. That truth is perceived in its singleness and purity as the unifying principle of

Catholic thought. There is no doubt either of the spiritual understanding of those whose lives are developed within the atmosphere of catholic experience, or of the spiritual ignorance of those who are not under its influence.

I would plead for more earnest devotion to the Holy Spirit in the inner life, not in words or acts of prayer only; but in the soul's willingness to learn of Him through experience. The sacred way leads into a deep knowledge of God, wonderful in itself, and glorious in the light of Divine love. We need to keep in view the light of the breaking vision of God; and under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, Whose office it is to reveal to us the things of God, advance along the way of knowledge and of wisdom. How blessed are the soul's experiences! There is nothing too great for the Divine bestowal if only we are prepared in love.

O Holy and Eternal Spirit, through Whose inspiration we are instructed in the way of holiness, and guided in the understanding of Heavenly counsels; assist us, we beseech Thee, that discerning the sacred way of Divine wisdom, we may pursue the same with ready obedience to Thy word, and the loving insistence of Thine inward direction; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

V

Restoration

"If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me."—Jer. xv. 19.

"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine Own sake, and will not remember thy sins."—Isa. xliii. 25.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."—Ps. li. 1.

"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit."—Ps. li. 12.

"He restoreth my soul."—Ps. xxiii. 3.

"Return unto thy rest, O my soul."—Ps. cxvi. 7.

THE sacred way leads through the world. The mystic road which the soul must pursue in its quest is not so high as to be unassailable from the world. Our spiritual foes are never far away, and many are the allurements held out to us. So near, in fact, is the world at all times that we are in constant danger from its deceptions. Who of us does not know from experience the insidiousness of the evil? Who of us has not grieved over the mistakes, the follies, the sins into which we have fallen unsuspectingly? Who of us has never felt the necessity of returning humbly,

penitently to the sacred way from which we had turned aside? And is not the pain, the shame at such a time all the greater in proportion to our knowledge of the way? We have known such glad hours of devotion, have rejoiced in the leading and teaching of the Holy Ghost, have gazed with hearts filled with love and eager with hope into the light beyond—and then? We have yielded to some passing attraction, indulged some new fancy, gone to one side or the other, and we know we have sinned. We measure our sin by the degree of spiritual knowledge to which we have attained; the pain which we feel lies deeper than the simple consciousness of doing or not doing; our remorse is allied to a re-awakened desire for God, and love; our sense of loss is hard to bear. But there would be no return to the sacred way if we had no feeling of the evil to which we have inclined. In this we perceive only the wondrous mercy of God.

We may properly distinguish between one and another of those who have deflected from the pathway. Some souls awaken to the knowledge of their loss and quickly accomplish their return. Such are they who have known and experienced much of Divine love; they have gazed into the glowing distances and felt the Divine attraction; they have even made efforts in the way of such mortification of the senses as they perceived to be necessary to their spiritual advance. Their error has not been malicious, but rather the outcome of imperfections which they have too lightly considered. Their sorrow is real and they hasten to return.

Again, there are some who, having once turned

aside, continue to wander, or they become hopeless, and even indifferent. Such are they whose experience of Divine love has been neither deep nor enduring. Often they have wandered as a relief from the discipline of the sacred way, or because of disappointment, or more probably because they have found no encouragement or help. And, alas ! it must be added, the fault is sometimes in a director, or confessor, who has failed to discern the soul's weakness or peril. This is all very grievous, but the means still remain, divinely assured, for the soul's restoration to the sacred way.

God never forsakes the soul so long as it is capable of response to grace. The tenderly merciful gift of prevenient grace disposes the heart towards that which it has lost, and leads to the moment when the wanderer comes to himself.¹ This is a most precious moment. It is charged with eternal consequences. It is most wonderful in blessedness, and in a strange blending of pain and joy. There is almost a conflict between the two, but joy is victorious because it is of love which is the dominating power at that time. In so far as love prevails there is a certain kind of joy. There may be also fear—fear of ourselves or of others, or dread of the future. Thus the soul is in conflict, but love triumphs. The Holy Ghost, “*the Spirit of grace and supplication*,”² constrains the soul to make its submission. He brings to the mind all that has been left, if not lost; all the helps by the way; the wondrous love of Jesus, and the unfailing sympathy of His Sacred Heart; all the encouraging visions of the way; the efficacious prayers of the Saints and

¹ Cf. S. Luke xv. 17.

² Zech. xii. 10.

the holy ministry of the Angels. What should the soul do?

The grace which has been so far effectual is given in order to move the soul to do penance. But even at this point, with so much to re-assure them, there is to be found with some a strange holding back. It may be just the unreasoned attitude of one who has never yet trusted the Divine love perfectly; but more often it appears as the continuance of the pride which led the soul away at the first. The wilfulness which led it astray now lingers in its hesitation to act in obedience to the Holy Ghost. In some cases there is the peculiar difficulty of "a proud nature"; by which is meant pride which is almost a part of themselves, elemental in their natural character. Pride is the curse of us all; but in some it is more particularly dominant. With such souls there is almost always a struggle; their better feelings are in conflict with their pride. They know what they ought to do. They know that only in humility and penitence they can return to the right way. The Divine call is clear: "*If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me*"¹; and yet they hold back.

There are very many in this state; they know and even desire the better way. Many there are to whom the sacred way is revealed who yet appear unable to break away from hindrances and opposition. Let such reflect that their very distress witnesses to the reality of that which they desire and yet fail to embrace. And their trouble will continue as long as they indulge the self-love which is really the cause

¹ Jer. xv. 19.

of their hesitation. Let them renounce the self which would dominate them and cast themselves without reserve upon the mercy of God, and they will find themselves once more in security. Let them hear the assuring word of God : “ *I, even I, am He that blotth out thy transgressions for Mine Own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*” ¹

The way of return lies through the Sacrament of Penance. But this calls for a definite action of the will : the wanderer must *will to return* : “ *I will arise and go to my Father.*” ² As by self-will we deflect from the sacred way, so by another act of the will, surrendering the self to God, do we return. The moment of decision is heavy with tremendous issues : the Holy Ghost prevails in love ; the Sacred Heart of Jesus responds with joy ; our Guardian Angel is content and glad ; the hosts of Angels rejoice with him ; and strength is given to the soul to persevere in penitence. Blessed, indeed, is the soul in the promise of that hour ; the pain of its penance is no longer dreaded, but rather does it hasten forward to accomplish it. Eager to tread again the upward way it would, if not restrained by wisdom, hasten too impetuously, and perhaps mar the joyous perfection of its restoration.

Let us think well of this, for indeed it would be wrong to discourage the eager penitent ; but at this point there is need that fervour be allied with wisdom, and contained by humility. The Sacrament of Penance should be approached with reverent lowliness and with burning love ; but this cannot be except we also prepare for confession in the same

¹ Isa. xliii. 25.

² S. Luke xv. 18.

spirit. Think of the effect of our preparation if we made our examen with fervour. How different it would be from the formal, and perhaps languid, undertaking with which the self might be satisfied. A fervent examen ! What a rarely beautiful thing ; and yet more truly possible than some imagine. Fervour is not a term for heated emotion. To the Christian it stands for something more deeply sacred. Fervour is rather the eagerness of the will in one who does not shrink from pain, who is not afraid of the truth, who desires to know both himself and God ; who moved by love alone burns hiddenly, labours patiently, wins his way calmly, and holds peacefully whatever God is pleased to give. Such fervour is so beautiful in its effects that we cannot wonder at the enemy's efforts to forestall its action. He would encourage that emotional fervour which is based in pride, and thereby move the soul to boastfulness, hastiness, presumption, from which we should pray to be delivered. But the truly fervent soul will go beyond all such motions of self-love, and will not permit itself to be hindered by them in its pursuit of pure divine understanding of its life, and above all of love as the very end of life.

Let us think of a contrite soul preparing with true fervour for the Sacrament of Penance as the gate of its return to the sacred way. Its penitence is a deep impulse of love, and being love is confident of its end ; there is even a tremulous joy as this wondrous working of love within itself is understood ; there is an unspeakable apprehension of the power of contrite love as it rises into the perfect penitence of the Soul of Jesus in His Passion ; there is the filling of

the soul with light as the truth is contemplated. Love makes forgiveness certain. There is no excitement, no agitation, for the soul contemplates a Divine reality which is above the reach of the senses, weakened and unreliable as they are by reason of the very sins for which it grieves. As all the past is laid bare, the particular sins recalled and judged by the soul within itself by love exalted now to oneness of purpose with Divine love, the assurance of peace grows stronger. But more, the love which so condemns the sin is very pure and at once exalts the soul, through its very humility, to a new understanding of all that God is keeping for it in the sacred way.

With what relief the soul grasps the truth ! There is an element of surprise as it looks to what it has found. There was fear of an offended God, and lo ! He is not angry. Can love be angry with love ? So God is not angry with the loving soul—and one who is truly contrite is truly loving. Most tenderly, and withal most searchingly, He discovers to the soul the truth about itself, and reveals the wickedness of sin ; but always so that the beauty and joy of love, and the glad welcome of the Father's Heart, are manifest. It can never be too strongly maintained that penitence is love in the act of condemning sin ; and the more completely we condemn our own sin, so much more wonderful is the triumph of love. It is restoring love, transforming love, exalting love, glorifying love. It is all this the nearer it approaches in character to the love of our Lord Beloved in His Passion. He condemned sin in His Own Person, and in the power of His perfect love.

As we deal with sin in contrite love there is set

before us a certain joy, as before our Lord in His Passion.¹ It is not simply the joy of return to spiritual privileges forfeited by us in the days of impenitence, great as this may be; nor is it the prospect of restored graces, or of self-respect in our religion; it is something worthier and more supernatural than any of these. It is the joy of God Himself, the glory of His love, within which we perceive the sweetness of all that we desire. There is nothing of all we have lost through sin, and long to regain, nothing of all we have forsaken and long how to return to, that is not contained within the joy of God for us. He rejoices in us, and in His joy reveals His Divine gladness in restoring us to our own in the sacred way, and restoring to us all its attractions. The robe, the ring, the shoes, all that is proper to the child of God are held as it were in readiness only waiting the Father's kiss of reconciliation.²

Seeing all this the fervent penitent will go to his Confession with loving determination. "*Father, I have sinned.*"³ "*Thus and thus have I done.*"⁴ Grieving over sin, and determined within himself as to his future conduct, he makes his Confession, and thereby goes over from the way of sin to the way of righteousness, he puts himself on the side of God against sin. Let any one who hesitates about Confession ask this of himself: while I refuse to avail myself of the Sacrament of Penance am I wholeheartedly on the side of God against my sin? If I turn from this Sacrament of Reconciliation am I really concerned about the privileges of sonship?

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

³ S. Luke xv. 20.

² S. Luke xv. 22.

⁴ Josh. vii. 20.

Can I say at all that I love Him? In such high concerns of the soul we cannot afford to neglect the proofs of love. Confession will be an act of deep love because it is our part in the act of reconciliation. The sacred kiss of the Father is not for the unwilling penitent. We want to return to the sacred way; let us do so in the frankest possible way with generous love.

We must seek love through love, restoration to love through submission to love. Our desire to return is not so ardent as the desire of God to receive us. Therefore submission is the surest way to the highest blessing of love. But of the tender personal joy in the Divine peace which accompanies the grace of Absolution who can speak? Yea, though many have spoken, there is a secret wonder of experience which is all our own. The child and the Father meet in a supreme act of love and none may meddle with the secret of that holy embrace. But the experience is that of every true penitent. The Divine words are abundantly fulfilled in the wondrous sympathy which the penitent feels and knows through all the stages of his restoration, and after. "*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.*"¹ "*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.*"² All that such words convey in their natural meaning is intensified in the soul's immediate experience through the prevailing love of our Lord in His Passion. The pain of our penitence, because it is the pain of rekindled love, passes into the treasure of the merit of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The consciousness of failure and weakness of effort in the past is met by His loving

¹ Ps. ciii. 13.

² Isa. lxvi. 13.

benediction upon the renewed will. The haunting fear which at times almost checked the development of contrition vanishes in the presence of the glorious reality of unchanging love. We might wonder at our own peace did we not know it as the peace of God, the peace of the Sacred Heart, the peace of the victorious Christ.

“I absolve thee!” What words they are! They are words of power, because they are the words of Christ the Head speaking through His Body the Church; they are simple words, simple as the eternal love from which they proceed; they are awful words, because they declare a tremendous fact, and attest a Divine operation; they are sweet words, full-charged with unutterable love declaring the soul’s restoration to the sacred way.

But the soul’s restoration through penance is no mere return to a routine of spiritual duties; it is even more than a return to happiness. Penance affects our conceptions of the spiritual life as a whole; and shapes the course of its development. If our penance be expressive of full and generous love, its effects abide; and as often as we seek absolution they are deepened. The fruit of the grace received is perfected in contrite love which is itself an essential in the saintly character. The Saints not only esteem penance: they love it and extol it. From them we learn how intimately it is connected with the very highest experience and most exalted states of grace. Because it is of love there is no grace or virtue which is not made more accessible to the aspiring soul, while of all the virtues that of humility is peculiarly assisted by penance.

It may be truly said that penance prepares us for the deep knowledge of God, for only to the pure in heart does He reveal Himself. The light of His love which fills the absolved soul is the very assurance of the fulness of the vision yet to be granted. In the sacred way, which is the way to the perfect knowing of God in love, the Sacrament of Penance must ever be to us the assurance of the tender love of God : and as we use it in contrite love the peace of God will fill our souls, and exalt us through humility to a divine joy.

This is the prospect opened to us, this is the hope inspired by love as we are guided in penitence. The fulness and freedom of life which is secured to us when we are restored to the sacred way should move us again and again to penance, for the joy of restoration exceeds the pain of our humiliation. Are we for any reason outside the experience of this? "*Return unto thy rest, O my soul.*" Of course this is not to suggest the frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance in any spirit but that of holy love. If we recognize the enormous advantage, the tremendous gain, to the soul that is cleansed, then not only is our frequenting of that Sacrament to be an act of great love, but also as that which leads always to holier joy. The fervour with which we prepare, and our subsequent performance of the penance enjoined, should be as the reaching forth of the soul to secure that high and holy, and withal most pure joy.

Greater care might be taken, and certainly would be taken, if we did penance in this better way. It is the cleansing of the sanctuary for the coming of the King; what care can, then, be too great, what

expectation too high? What joy could be greater than that the King Himself inspires by His coming? If we have known this, let us seek by love to deepen the experience by even worthier preparation for our Lord Beloved.

Almighty Father, Who hast called us to the way of holiness, and knowest how many are the dangers that beset our steps; preserve us, we pray Thee, in safety, and keep us in Thy love; and if we have wandered from Thee through pride, or weakness, restore us in Thy mercy, and keep us evermore in peace through obedience to Thy holy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

VI

The Heavenly Manna

"My Father giveth you the true Bread from Heaven."—S. John vi. 32.

"I am the Bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst."—S. John vi. 35.

"My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me and I in him."—S. John vi. 55, 56.

"Come, eat of My Bread, and drink of the Wine which I have mingled."—Prov. ix. 5.

"The Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them."—Rev. vii. 17.

PILGRIMS in the sacred way must sometimes contemplate the end of their journey, the goal to be reached when the days are fulfilled. Theirs is a glorious quest, a high emprise. What seek they? God, and that eternal wisdom which consists in knowing Him. They seek in love. They aspire to union with Him who is love.

Union with God! How conscious we are of weakness, even though the promised grace be given. The Divine strength which is made perfect in our weakness does not hide that weakness, but sanctifies it as the occasion for the Divine operation. How sensible we are to the disparity which exists between ourselves

as we are and the height of goodness to which we aspire. How easy it would be to yield to an ever-ready temptation to give up in despair of ever attaining to it. All this we feel, and yet we know within ourselves that we are not attempting the impossible. Beneath the sense of weakness there is a surer consciousness. The spirit within witnesses to a truth from which there is no escape. Nothing is impossible to the child of God. We know that of ourselves we are nothing, but that knowledge comes with the realization of the power of God. No one can say with sincerity, "I am nothing," if he has not a lively sense of the power of God working in him and through him. Knowing, therefore, our poverty and weakness, we seek to be replenished interiorly with all that makes for spiritual power, and to be sustained in life. That is, we desire and seek both life and power whereby we may attain to the joyous ending of our pilgrimage.

As we dwell in thought upon the end in view, and feel through deepening life that it is nearer, we understand the nature of that which we need for its attainment. We want the power to know God, to love Him as we should and to attain to the gift of Divine wisdom in its fulness. As already we have the gift in part, so the Holy Ghost who gives it enables us to perceive how much it may be increased, that is, how God wills to perfect it. We gaze into the far distances of the way, into the deep pure glory beyond which is God; yea, into the far extending rays which are as manifold as the thoughts of His wisdom; and we ask: How can we win so great a good? The sacred way appears long, and the one need of our

souls seems only to be emphasized at every step—the need of strength, of life, the power to win and to hold. And only God can impart the gift. We know Him because He strengthens us to that end, that we may bear the vision.¹ Let us not shrink from pain or difficulty when called to strive in pureness of soul after that which God offers; He will ever strengthen us to receive it.

But God wills to be known, known by us who now are weak, and often afraid. He wills to give to us the kingdom of peace, the kingdom of His love, though like Israel of old in the wilderness we fail in courage, and are strangely engrossed with temporal things, and selfish aims, which result only in powerlessness. Their progress in the wilderness way is very full of teaching for us in the spiritual way. The story of their journeying reads like a mystical treatise, so wondrously true is it to the soul's experience in the spiritual way. But for our purpose now we must consider only how they were miraculously sustained and fed by the way.

God fed them with Manna; a food at first strange to them. "*Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with Manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.*"²

¹ Cf. Dan. x. 19.

² Deut. viii. 2, 3.

God gave them, moreover, water from the rock, a supernatural and mystical gift, which the devout Israelite did not forget.¹

May we not say that being so divinely given there was in them a sacramental value? They were gifts which continued for the refreshment of the people throughout their wanderings.² Regarded as sacramental their fruit may be discerned in the faithful among the Israelites, who rose above the sins which beset them in the wilderness, and who through the years of discipline developed a finer spirituality, and were prepared for the spiritual responsibility of their life in the Promised Land. The provision ceased when they entered the land; but the memory of it was not lost. The golden pot of Manna was preserved in the very holiest part of the Tabernacle.³ The sacred writer alludes again and again to the Manna as to one of the most wonderful and gracious of God's gifts in the day of the people's need. And when our Lord came the memory of it was as dear as ever to the people. This should not be forgotten in its relation to the Blessed Sacrament.

When the time came for our Lord to teach His disciples the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and Blood, He built upon that experience of Israel in the wilderness. The discourse which S. John records⁴ began with a direct reference to the Manna, called forth by a question from the Jews.

¹ Exod. xvii. 6; Num. xx. 7-11; Deut. viii. 15; ix. 21; 1 Cor. x. 2, 4.

² "The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan speak of a 'well' which followed the Israelites in their wanderings."²

³ Exod. xvi. 32, 35.

⁴ S. John vi. 26-65.

We may, therefore, assume His reference to the spiritual pilgrimage of His disciples.

Regarding the Blessed Sacrament as the Food of the soul in the sacred way, let us try to understand its purpose. There is the assimilation by the soul of its proper Food, the consequence of which is declared by our Lord : "*He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.*" This union becomes more wondrously intimate and blessed, as through frequent communions the soul is both strengthened within itself, and quickened in its perceptions. "*Discerning the Lord's Body,*" the soul responds with deeper devotion, while His love makes the realization of union an ever-increasing joy.

But this is so often lacking in communicants. Why should not the soul, which is through the Blessed Sacrament renewed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, become more interiorly joyful? In part the failure may be traced to the fact that we are so much engrossed in the present, and do not look on with sufficiently joyous anticipation to all that is assured to us in that gift of our Lord. We do not always even try to rise to the joy. Can there be any lack of joy in the Heart of our Divine Lord? If through our Communions we are brought into union with that Sacred Heart, ought we not to share Its joy? Ought it not to be more evident in us, more contagious? We are surely called both to rejoice and give joy. It might be asked, why is renewed Communion so necessary? Might not the soul be established in union with our Lord by a single reception of the Blessed Sacrament? It is sufficient to say : He has willed it otherwise, and for reasons which will appear

as we proceed. True, it is for the union of the faithful with their Lord; and so has within it all the assurance of that knowledge and wisdom which is the spiritual quest of the pilgrim. But God gives not this blessing in its fulness save through the proof of His Gift in human life and experience. We must make our response continually in love, and by use of His Gift go forward with holier aspiration and clearness of purpose. Each Communion, therefore, has its own importance according to the needs of the day. It is the Food for the day, given with immediate reference both to the necessities of the day, and also to the end in view. The constant demands upon the powers both of soul and body, the struggles, the efforts and aspirations of the pilgrim are directly concerned with that which is set before him. He must be always contemplating the end—the goal—of his journey; and the glory which attracts him glows the brighter for every act of faithfulness, and every work of courageous love.

To us in the sacred way the Blessed Sacrament is the Bread of our pilgrimage. By It the whole being is built up and empowered. We face the prospect of the spiritual course, and consider its requirements, with all our powers attuned to their proper end, and with a certain elation and eagerness, because *life* within us is renewed in healthful freshness. It is a joy to look out, even upon the more difficult stretches of the road before us, because we are intent upon the glory in the distance. The renewal of life through the Blessed Sacrament reassures us by the implied promise of that glory. The Heavenly Manna will

cease only when the journey is over and we have passed our Jordan.¹

But as in the very power of Christ we contemplate the way and move forward in His strength to fulfil His purpose of life in us, there is an answering experience within: we are learning, we are being disciplined and trained, we are being conformed to a higher ideal from day to day. And what is this but the fitting of the soul for its true dignity of sonship, and kingship, hereafter? Just as the faithful Israelite was prepared for the Promised Land by his devout use of the gifts of the Wilderness Way, so we in our way are prepared for all that lies beyond. We may even think of our Lord Beloved, Who is Himself the living Bread,² entering with deliberate intention of love into the very centre of our being, to be to us all that the exigencies of the way make needful in us. Hence we rightly regard the value of particular intention on the part of the communicant. It is not that the general needs of the soul are less truly recognized and acknowledged; but that some particular necessity is represented to our Lord that He may fill us, and by the gift of Himself become within us the power corresponding to our necessity. We may be led to this not only by the needs of the days which, as we know, are from time to time painfully pressing; but also by what we understand in our prayer as God Himself reveals His purpose of love towards us. In communion we can remember the needs knowing that He also is mindful of them.

When the end is reached we shall see how all experiences have been taken up into a certain wide-

¹ Cf. Josh. v. 12.

² S. John vi. 48-51.

ness of understanding; when we contemplate God it will be with a certain fulness of conception. We may contemplate the joy which in the Vision of God will be given, when the Divine wisdom is reached, and the perfected gifts of the Holy Ghost enrich our being. The relation between cause and effect will be evident in the tender beauty of graces in which spiritual energy has become crystallized in the peculiar features of personal holiness.

But before the consummation thus anticipated is reached, many steps must intervene, all of which are directed to the vision of glory. Many days must pass in which nothing may appear to be possible. Many rays of light must fall upon the pathway which are but partial and fleeting. There will be manifestations of God and Heavenly things tempered to our capacity. All these may be observed both many times and in many ways; and for every experience we shall need strength. The strength is given; the Heavenly Manna is the effectual means. We must know God by the power of His Own life in us.

Hear, then, our Lord. "*I am the Bread of life : he that cometh to Me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst. . . . For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.*"¹ "*Come, eat of My Bread, and drink of the Wine which I have mingled.*"² We should respond to this call of our Lord with deliberate intention, as looking to the end we perceive and know within ourselves our deep needs; and also as we realize God's Own concern and desire towards us

¹ S. John vi. 35, 55, 56.

² Prov. ix. 5.

in this very matter. Our need is great and can be estimated only in reference to the eternal purpose of Divine love towards us. True, we must regard the needs of the day, but always as they exist in relation to our requirements in the future. The Divine provision is vaster than our minds can reach, even though we were already perfect in grace. God wills to be known. That is a great purpose of love; and in His coming and gift in the Blessed Sacrament we perceive the working of that love. How can we rightly respond? What must be the attitude of the soul in Communion? How should we approach the Blessed Sacrament upon whom the light of the distant glory already rests? What attitude of reverent confidence, and strong adoring love, should be ours as the result of past Communions? To us in the sacred way Communion is more than consolation, more than refreshment, how great soever these may be. Rather may we say, the soul that is consoled and refreshed is borne by the uplifting power of renewed life, into the very movement of Divine life, and held, as it were, upward while the light of God with brighter beams shines upon it and within it. Our attitude, then, should be one of expectant love, of surrendered being. We may not know the visible effects any more than Moses was aware of the transfiguration of his own countenance. That is of the least importance, and the Saints to whom such grace has been given have been the last to speak of it. But we may know the joy of interiorly increased power, of clearer insight, of a wider outlook: we may be consciously nearer the goal of our hopes, the point of our aspirations.

“He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.” Every good Communion renews this union with the Beloved, by Whom we are brought nigh and made able to hear the deepening experience of Heavenly life. The distance which separates the earthly from the Heavenly is bridged by Communion. If our hearts are in Heaven, we soon begin to realize that life itself is developing in supernaturalness. Heavenly movements affect us. The very motions of love in the Heart of our Lord influence us and give direction to our love, and this in manifold ways, until it becomes the normal experience of His love in us. It would be a help to souls if, realizing they have been brought by Communion into closer union with the Heart of our Lord, they would not only pray for this, but also aspire to a life of such perfect union with Him, that in all things they might express only the pure impulses of the love of His Sacred Heart. With that prayer and aspiration becoming daily more effectual in them, their work and conversation, their manner and attitude towards all about them, would be marked by very wonderful love. It was said of one not long ago, who is no longer in this world, “How radiant he was!” What was it but the radiance of the Divine love which filled his soul? That is what it ought to be. If there be the joy, there will be also the radiance of the Divine love filling our whole being. In that way we may hope to give a not wholly unworthy response to the aspirations of love from the Heart of our Lord. Thus He leads us on from grace to grace, from strength to strength; not without many hind-

rances, and perhaps failures, at the first; but they are not to be allowed to discourage us, for there is a promise given to pilgrims in the sacred way of very wonderful power, of strength to advance, which must not be passed over.

*“ They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint.”*¹ This promise assures us of a degree of love, of spiritual life made strong, which we may well aspire to in the sacred way while daily we seek renewal of life in Communion. Indeed, the life made strong is the immediate result of Communion, as we make our efforts in love in response to the life given. The result is a certain spiritual elevation, or elation of soul, whereby the pilgrim is urged forward. He takes no account of labours, and feels no longer the weariness of the way. Moses could say of the faithful Israelites at the end of the long wilderness way: *“ Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.”*² This is equally true mystically of the soul in the sacred way. It is a state of great spiritual pureness, for it is above the influence of earthly things. However rare this may be, it is yet a true experience of the Saints. The very truth of it may inspire us, and keep us strong and brave in our days of trial. There is the promise, we have but to love with all our hearts, and for love’s sake to be unshrinking, and the strength will be given, and the joy.

But we are warned to be in all things humble, not only that we may attain through humility to

¹ Isa. xl. 31.

² Deut. viii. 4.

this higher perfection of love and life, but also that we may not lose what already has been gained; for pride in any spiritual gift is the sure way of losing it. In spiritual things the depths are as heights. We ascend by humility, we descend by spurious spiritual exaltation. The humble soul, abiding in the love of God, will mount up as the eagle, and run without fear and without weariness.

O Lord Jesu Christ Who art Thyself the Living Bread whereby we are both sustained in life here, and preserved unto life eternal; may we always so love and adore Thee in the Blessed Sacrament of Thy Body and Blood, and so live by Thy life, that Thy purpose of love in us may not fail, but that we may be made like unto Thee, Who by means of this Sacrament willest to make Thy Tabernacle in us; Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God world without end. Amen.

VII

Satisfaction and Desire

"He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."—Ps. cvii. 9.

"They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures."—Ps. xxxvi. 8.

"My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips."—Ps. lxiii. 5.

"My people shall be satisfied with My goodness."—Jer. xxxi. 14.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"—Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."—Ps. xvii. 15.

ONE of the most certain experiences of a soul in its aspiration to a perfect degree of love, is that of mingled satisfaction and desire. The satisfaction of desire is immediately followed by increased capacity of soul, and a consequent newness of desire. The pain which may be felt is simply that of love, and is, therefore, never, in fact, separated from a certain gladness; for love is ever glad within itself. There

is no bitterness in the pain of love. It may be deep, penetrating, and beyond any description which is not to the inexperienced suggestive of unaccountable suffering; but to the faithful soul it is precious beyond words. The Saints of all ages who have spoken of it have always employed the language of physical suffering, because they had no other. It is a painful thirst, a hunger, a burning, a weakness as of utter nothingness which the soul experiences.¹ And yet all this is most willingly endured, for to lose the pain is to part also with the secret joy of love. All this must enter into our experience in the sacred way.

We have reached a point at which we must consider this movement of love within the soul—its satisfaction and its desire. The sacramental life with all its power, and with all its wondrous purpose, develops a strong love; love which is not only felt and acknowledged, but also manifested in vehement desire after God. It is the property of love to desire the possession of its object. When we love God we long to possess Him. Often the pain of long waiting would be unendurable did He not comfort us with the assurance of His Own desire towards us, a desire which breathes encouragement through the discipline of our waiting. One day the vision will be ours, not as an object of faith, but as the possession of love; and we are never more sure of this than in the hour of love's deepest consciousness, when we both feel the pain of longing, and begin by aspiration to possess that which we desire. Perhaps we have known some holy hour when, to ease the longing, there was given

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, D.N., Bk. I. xi. 1, 3.

to us some wondrous Divine grace, an emergence, as it were, from the Heaven of God's love of some living force which possessed and exalted us. For the time we may have thought our interior trials were surely over, that the desire of our hearts was at last to be satisfied. Great was the joy and very real the satisfaction; for all our being was held in the rapture of the moment. It was clear and beautiful and strong; but for all that we experienced it was incomplete. What was lacking?

In that time our Lord was very near, and yet we saw Him not. When the spiritual impression had passed we thought of this: and we went forward again, with a deeper longing for completeness. But was it, therefore, unreal? No, it was not unreal, for nothing that our Lord gives is unreal. But He disclosed not *Himself* as yet.¹ But He greatly encourages the soul in its quest. By His communication of grace He makes us know His love. He reveals His Own pleasure in us, even permitting us to know that we are pleasing to Him. This is a secret joy very real, but given only to the humble. All this may have been ours, and yet His Form we saw not. How wondrously He hides Himself within His Own glory.²

Truly blessed is the experience. We are blessed, we are filled, we are made rich; we possess that which no earthly power can take from us. We know ourselves the very object of Divine love. We even dare to say in the fulness of exalted consciousness: "*My Beloved is mine, and I am His.*"³ And yet

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, Spiritual Canticle, i. 2, 3.

² Isa. xlv. 15.

³ Cant. ii. 16.

we but long for more. Is this experience good? Is our spiritual attitude a right one? Yes, it is; for the satisfaction which does not stimulate the desire for God is poor, partial, selfish. It does not advance the soul. We ought not to rest in any present satisfaction, but look rather to that which is set before us. So long as we have the power to act, we ought not to rest as though we had already attained¹; for the graces of to-day are given that we may be prepared for that which is yet higher and more blessed in the days to come. We ought, therefore, while lovingly and gratefully using and rejoicing in the gifts of to-day, try to understand their uses in the development of the great plan of our spiritual life. And surely the fact that we are exalted by the Divine gift should make us not only able to discern the truth in every promise given for the sacred way; but eager also to attempt and win the next height. We are not without such encouragements. In the upward way of prayer there are given occasional glimpses of heights beyond; and these we must desire to win. God gives them to that end.

At times the grace of our Communion develops in this way. There is within us a sense of power, of energy, of secret capacity both for knowledge and love, a longing of spirit which is not easily expressed. Indeed we can give expression to it only through the silent utterance of our spirit in its own detached desire, and in its unutterable prayer which only the Holy Spirit Himself may interpret, as indeed He does while completing it. "*The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities : for we know not what we should pray*

¹ Cf. Phil. iii. 12-14.

*for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the Saints according to the will of God."*¹ There are desires after God which are peculiar to states of detachment. They are not easily expressed, but find utterance in interior ways as the soul is assisted by the Holy Ghost.

Such is our experience from time to time in the sacred way; and we should not be unmindful of its purpose. There is no aimlessness in God's dealing with us. That we do not always perceive His intention is the result of our own failure of purpose, or lack of determination in the spiritual life. Hence we may miss the true purpose of God in such experiences as we have considered. But we should resolve not to miss it. If in the sacred way we are moving towards the vision of God and the perfect possession of Him, we are to understand all these experiences as being God's way for us. By them He prepares the soul He loves for all that He is preparing for it. In His Own desire to give, and be possessed by the soul He loves, He gives by the way all that can assure, cheer and gladden. The way by which we journey is long, and often painful, but it is a necessary way, it could not be other than it is, or He would certainly have so ordered it. He cannot, perhaps, for very love shorten it. And why should we desire to have it shortened? We do, indeed, long for the rest which is perfect life; but this longing is not impatience. We long, indeed, but not only for the

¹ Rom. viii. 26-27.

end : we desire, perhaps most of all, to use each day and hour of grace, every special gift, in such a way that the end may be but the more joyous and beautiful.

This is why we see the great Saints hiding the burning desire and longing of their hearts under the calmness of patient work, of joyous suffering, of brave endurance. They know how to wait because they know how to love, or rather, because they know how God loves. Their love is made in all things conformable to His. They would not miss now any part of love's experience of Him, because they will not miss through any fault in the present the fulness of vision and possession hereafter.¹ This is generally characteristic of the Saints, but not generally characteristic of average Christians. It is too heroic for those in whom self-love yet rules. And further, its absence indicates some inner defectiveness of principle underlying their relation to God. They do not love Him in simplicity, and for Himself alone. They do not love Him in a way that takes no account of trials except as means of proving love. They regard all pain and distress as rather the negation of love; whereas if they but loved Him in spirit, and independently of all that affects the outward life, they would perceive the pure intention of His love and realize its power within themselves. They would know how to profit by experience, and to value it in its relation to the end.

Let us meet this necessity of the sacred way with loving reasonableness, and great patience. Eagerly

¹ Cf. S. Teresa, *Conceptions of Divine Love*, vii., Minor Works, p. 180.

we would pass through the intermediate glories to find the Beloved, to gaze with all our love into His Sacred Face. But could we bear it? Is even the holiest sentiment in us quite sufficient to enable us to look into the Face of the Beloved? Would not the very first look reveal us to ourselves, and compel us to fall back abashed and repentant because of something in us which His look of love would disclose? Should we not be rebuked by Love for love's rashness? Ah, yes! The moment we expected would be so full of gladness would be one of deepest humiliation. Our over-boldness would lead to loss and pain. It is not without reason that loving and eager souls are warned against presumption and over-boldness. We might minimize the danger were it not the fact that the warning is uttered by those whose knowledge of the ways of Divine Love is of the highest.¹ Humility is never more necessary than to the soul whom God exalts in love.

Yet, we are not to assume that this love in its strong desire is other than pleasing to God. Love may be vehement, eager, strong in its appeal to Him, without being over-bold in expression. So far as it is pure love, He inspired it; and it is to that extent well-pleasing to Him. But it is not yet a perfect love. The perfecting of love is the Divine work to be accomplished in the sacred way. We are to be led through satisfaction to holier desires of love, only again to be purified and made stronger. And this will go on until our love becomes so pure that without knowing exactly how we have attained to it, we shall look into the Face of the Beloved in the

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, N.D., Bk. II. xx. 3.

pure contentment of satisfied love. Made strong through patience and humility we shall not be over-bold, but rather confident in love, love that has risen through experience to a great simplicity. This love He will bless; and it is this we must pray for. He will not fail us. He has begun the good work in us and He will perfect it.

A warning is, perhaps, needed here. It is possible to desire God too much for our own sakes, whereas our desire should rise beyond all thought of self. We long for all that He wills to be to us; but let us add to this longing the desire to serve Him the better; let us with goodwill go forward to that end. It is the angelic way. The Angels experience to the uttermost the joy of God, but it becomes in them the power of service; and so it should be with us. We cannot attain to all we desire if self be the motive. And we know how the love of self can spoil even our most spiritual service. But the knowledge may lead to carefulness in devotion and great purity of intention; and then like the Angels we shall find in the Divine love an inspiration, ever beautiful in its sufficiency.

Let us contemplate the end of the sacred way. It glows with the light of the glory of God. The more lovingly we seek to penetrate the mystery of that glory—for it is a mystery in the very splendour of its light—the more certainly do we find the very Truth itself; the rays or beams of glory are as revelations of God in His attributes. He Whom we love and seek attracts us by His Own perfections; and though still unperceived by us in His Personal beauty, there is the force of His love which is not

only powerfully real, but to us also strongly personal. We cannot fail of desire towards this end of our pilgrimage seeing it is that which our love requires for its consummation. Having seen the glory we cannot rest in any state short of attainment.

Therefore we must aspire to all that our love makes evident to us; and all the more because it corresponds to the needs felt and known within ourselves, and appeals to us in the fulness of our spiritual powers. Yea, in contemplation of it we know how wide is the range of those powers, and how they may develop in loving activity. Thus to behold and to apprehend what God has in keeping for us will move us to very holy aspiration. In the light of all we know and understand the attractions of the world must appear poor indeed. Our spirit rises to the only possible satisfaction of its own longings, and anything less must proclaim its own insufficiency. God has created us with capacity for Himself, and in proportion to our realization of this fact of our spiritual nature do we prove the inadequacy of mere sensible gratification. We cannot be satisfied with anything less than God. "*Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.*"¹

The deep consciousness of the difference between the lower satisfaction of the senses and the higher satisfaction of the spirit, is to be preserved; but it is of so delicate a nature that it may be lost very easily by indulgence of the senses contrary to the inner warning of conscience. Great care should, therefore, be taken by any one in whose soul is this delicate appreciation of the things of God. We shall preserve

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 25.

it best by directing both thought and desire in the way of its development. By aspiration we both keep clear the way of spiritual satisfaction, and are exalted in the way of attainment. This is to be understood through personal experience; but it will not be missed by any one who is faithful in the spiritual quest.

It is not well only to contemplate the future: we ought rather to follow up the thoughts and considerations which awaken somewhat uneasily in our hearts. We need to examine ourselves, to discover what is amiss, what is affecting our progress, or hindering it, what there may be with us which we could not bear to have when we look into the Face of the Beloved. Is there anything in us that would be rebuked by His love? The question may be answered best by asking further, is there anything which His love already rebukes in us? And it is a matter of intimate and present importance. We should humble ourselves to the lowest while we listen to His rebuke. It is clear and unmistakable, while the very gentleness of His accents makes it the more forceful. We are rebuked by love issuing from the Heart wherein its flame burns with consuming power. We cannot but realize that His rebuke is not opposed to our desires; but rather is directed to the purifying of them by purifying the love from which they spring. So great is His care for us that He never forgets the reality of even imperfect love. His will is to satisfy the soul perfectly; but before He can do that the soul itself must be trained and guided in the way of most pure love. That which imposes a check upon us is after all the most blessed action of His love towards

us. We need not, therefore, hesitate to offer all our desires, and aspire to their fulfilment, we need not stifle the promptings of love in our hearts, if at the same time we are ready and glad to be even rebuked by His love for anything that is wrong in us; for humility will be our first step towards the required grace or perfection.

The one necessity is simplicity, without which we shall not attain to interior peace. Simplicity is the saving virtue in one who is as ready to be taught of the Holy Ghost as he is ready to give all in proof of its love; who thinks more of ultimate perfection than of present consolation; who rejoices in every gift in this present time, but yet more in the hope of that which is to come.

O Lord God, Who being eternal love art the only satisfaction of those who love Thee; we beseech Thee so to magnify Thy love to us, that we may be moved to worthier efforts in the way of holiness, and aspire with purer love to that which Thou hast set before us, even that vision of Thy glory which is the perpetual joy of Thy Saints in Heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth in the unity of love for ever. Amen.

VIII

“Shew Me Thy Glory”

“He said, I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory. And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the Name of the Lord before thee.”—Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

“My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?”—Ps. xlii. 2.

“O God, Thou art my God ; early will I seek Thee : my soul thirsteth for Thee . . . in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is ; To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the Sanctuary.”—Ps. lxiii. 1, 2.

THE humble loving soul may lawfully express its desires in prayer. The holier they are the more certainly should they be declared. Seeing that every good thought is of the Holy Ghost, we should seek to express them in the simple confidence of loving communion with God. I would speak now of the more exalted thoughts, and motions of love which belong to our highest consciousness. Coming as they do from Him, and moving us in a way above the ordinary level of our devotion, they are very pure and refined, they belong wholly to the spirit's life in Him, they are not the products of our own mind. To express them as from ourselves to Him is to deepen the impression in the consciousness of

living love. If in that which He inspires we can perceive His desire towards ourselves, an expression of His love, tender and yet strong, let us rejoice in it with Him. It will become fruitful in love. The human spirit moved by the Spirit of God responds to the warmth and glow of Divine love. But what follows? A certain consciousness of the spirit's need, and a new desire towards God as its true end; for the more we understand of God, the more we must desire to know and possess Him. We cannot live without Him. We must possess Him or die.

This is love—love which is the very life of the soul. If we so love God that our very life goes forth to Him, then to lose Him would be death. And there are times of such deep realization of love, that is of life in Him, that we perceive the eternity of His Self-giving to us. Our need of Him is emphasized in the fact of His love which inspires while it fills, and quickens the languishing spirit.

And this as an experience is very sure where there has been a true and patient response to earlier leadings of the Holy Spirit; for there is an orderly progression in those desires which spring from His inspiration. Some are capable of immediate satisfaction, because they belong rather to the present life; others must continue, both in their pain and their joy, perhaps until our departure from this life, because they belong rather to the state of blessedness hereafter. But whatever their character, we may cherish them, knowing that He Who inspired them will fulfil them at the right time, if we ourselves are obedient and humble.

It is to be feared that not all, even prayerful souls,

are properly heedful of their interior movements of the Spirit of God, Who gently directs their thoughts and encourages holy desires. And yet there cannot be one whose prayer is real, that does not know this quickening of thought by love in the nearer contemplation of God and eternal things. But very much is wasted because the moment has not been seized and turned to account. They are not unloving, but yet have not attained to the simplicity of a perfect intention in their spiritual life. Love in them is not, as yet, burning with clear-pointed flame. They need, therefore, to become more simple and pure in intention when they pray, and to wait with loving patience upon the Holy Spirit. In the sacred way holy desires accompany every sure attainment, and love increases through its own desires.

The desires and longings of the Saints are ultimately for the vision of God.¹ Nothing else would be consistent with their profession of love. They know that love must ultimately possess its object. They never labour under the disadvantage which some of us have, of loving in an aimless way. They are sure in their love, and certain of the ultimate possession of God Whom they love, and so with clear intention they go to their prayer. And this fact that love must ultimately possess its object is as true of Divine love as of human love; and short of final possession they regard the visitation of God in love as inevitable. "The soul that finds no pleasure out of God cannot be long unvisited by the Beloved." We are not, therefore, surprised at the prayer of Moses. "I

¹ Cf. Ps. xvii. 15; lxv. 4; 1 S. John iii. 2; *S. John of the Cross*, *Spiritual Canticle*, x., xi.

beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.” And this is the desire of one who had received abundant graces and revelations. He was already eighty years of age; and in estimating this request which his love impelled him to make, we have to remember the long years of watching with the sheep in the desert of Sinai which ended with the vision of the Burning Bush. How wondrously he had grown in prayer during that time. He had grown through that secret learning of the ways of God which cannot be measured by any known standard. Perhaps in his humility he noticed little of this growth, save in the way of that perfect self-effacement which made him “*very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.*”¹ With this grace of meekness there was also purity of heart, for his simplicity in receiving Divine revelation, and his extraordinary openness with God, could not otherwise have been possible. His mission to Pharaoh, and his leadership of the emancipated hosts of Israel, followed by the giving of the Law with its accompaniment of wonder and terror, must be viewed in the light of his own developing holiness and intimacy with God. What had been the rapture of his soul again and again? What were his experiences on Sinai during those twice-told forty days? What unspeakable love must have held him? The miraculous fact twice told, of forty days, the rigour and zeal manifest in his denunciation of the people’s sin, and, above all, the supernatural glory of his countenance, reveal the fact of his communion with God, as absorbing as it was exalting. And within that experience of God he lived through that

¹ Num. xii. 3.

most glorious revelation which was the Divine answer to his prayer, "*I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.*"

Are we to accuse this great Saint of over-impulsiveness? Certainly not. Rather must we ascribe his action to a particular movement of love, rapturous and intense. There, separated from the world of men, and sustained amid divinely spiritual realities, in the very presence of God, he was penetrated with Divine love and all his own being responded. He felt both his need of God and his spiritual capacity for God. There was mutual response, his love answered to the Divine love, the Divine love to his. God and the soul met in the awful yet thrilling familiarity within which there sprang to eager expression a new and burning impulse: "*I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.*"

Well may we wonder at the supernatural pureness of the soul of Moses; well wonder at the glimpse afforded of man's nature at its best. But for the present, because we want to learn the ways of Divine love for our own guidance, we must concentrate our attention upon the meeting of God and the soul in mutual recognition. "*I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight.*"¹ There is a moment when this is understood within the soul; a moment that stands out from the record of the hour vividly—yea, even gloriously. Such are moments of inspiration, of wonderful knowledge, of Divine union. And it would be strange, indeed, if no strong cry of love went forth from the soul to God; or if there were no aspiration, no leap as it were of the soul to God in unspeakable desire. They are rare moments,

¹ Exod. xxxiii. 12, 17.

but in the sacred way are souls upon whom their benediction rests. They have desired the vision of God, and their desire grows while there is granted so much of it as they can bear. To them “*to live is Christ.*” They would cry with S. Teresa, “O Life, Life, how canst thou still exist, apart from Him Who is thy life?” They who so live must know Him in unspeakable ways.

We may be a long way off from that high degree of love which in the great Saints has been so blessed of God; but in contemplation of the degrees of love, we remember that our distance from them is, after all, a matter of degree: we are yet in the same way, even if it be at the very beginning. This is our encouragement when we would learn from the Saints and their experience in the ways of love. If we know anything of Divine love, if we are living in it as the very power of life, as well as its sole satisfaction, we must have lived through many sacred times of holy interior experience with God. We must have known that restful gladness of meeting wherein new impulses of love sought expression. And were they not always, in some sort, a reaching forth of the soul after God, after the satisfaction which the vision and possession of Him alone can afford? I think if we analyze our feeling of devotion at such a time we shall prove it be so.

What, then, do we gain from such considerations? We prove that in our times of most pure devotion, when love is most simple, we turn most naturally to God, that He alone is sought and desired. And, moreover, we know ourselves, and realize that we are never so truly ourselves as in that activity of

love. Let us be quite honest with ourselves. We might have this happiness more often, and we should do so, if we were not such lovers of ease in the care of our souls. All that is worth having in the spiritual life can be obtained only at some cost to ourselves; and we are not always willing to meet the demand. And yet how important it is to be ready to suffer. The full value of our opportunities may not be apparent to us now; but some day we shall know. And then we shall regret that we did so little, and shunned so much of discomfort and hardness and discipline, that we were too engrossed with ourselves to heed the call of God and go out in love to Him.

All the great moments of the soul's life in the sacred way are related to previous experiences in the way of prayer. Our highest ascents in devotion, our most blessed intuitions of God, our tensest moments of prevailing love, have all been prepared for. It is true, we speak of gratuitous graces; but although they are free gifts of God, and wholly undeserved, they are never given to the unprepared soul. This is evident in the histories of the Saints whose extraordinary graces excite us to wonder and admiration. But the preparation consists in the simple and sustained response of the soul to God in love, and not in any work undertaken with the idea of attracting such graces. The occasion is determined by God alone; but if it is His pleasure to bestow graces and thereby to increase merit in the soul, we should carefully dispose ourselves beforehand, for He cannot increase merit when none has been acquired. This increase of merit is understood of the higher graces among which I think we may fairly include the

experience of Moses to which we have referred.¹ How, then, may we prepare for any favour of God?

The answer is, we must be prepared in love through persevering prayer. It is a work of great simplicity; and for that very reason we may neglect it. Prayer must always be a work, and as work it presents its difficulties; but the action of love must prevail over each difficulty as it arises, or, to speak more correctly, it must prevail *through* the difficulty. If in our prayer we seek only to be one with God in love, in purpose of heart, even attaining to that oneness through suffering and distractions, we shall become settled in love. There may be nothing in our prayer that tends towards self-gratification; we may feel there is very much that is lacking in our devotion; but if we are faithful in love and aspiring to its perfection, we shall be inwardly preparing for anything it may please our Lord to bestow.

It is to the soul really loving, though perhaps without any feeling other than that of quiet determination, of calm willing in the way of love, that our Lord comes with His most precious gifts. Suddenly, and with gentleness which is at once intimate and personal, He gives proof of His love. He draws the soul within His love, and rewards in a moment many a long day of trial wherein prayer was maintained only at the cost of great effort. The graces follow upon the preparation. And the same is true of all that we may experience of graces in prayer. There is not one, however transient, but follows upon its appropriate preparation in God's sight. As He

¹ Cf. *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, xviii. 37-40 S. Teresa, *Conceptions of the Love of God*, Minor Works, vi. 7.

is the Giver of all good, so He is the Judge of the soul's fitness to receive it.

But such graces are fruitful and particularly in holy desires. We cannot be so near God, feel His presence, receive His gifts, and kindle at the touch of His love, and not aspire to yet fuller knowledge. And so we dare to take the words of Moses and make them our own: "*Shew me Thy glory.*"

Can we do this without presumption? Yes. But we must use them with intelligence, not as a prayer that pleases us by its beauty of thought. In the first place we may use it as a prayer for the immediate present. That we may behold all that for the present we are capable of beholding. Moses, for all his spiritual greatness and holiness, was reminded of his limitations; let us not forget our own. And let us also be content with what He gives. There is perfect love in every gift of God, while the graces He bestows are so adapted to our capacity that we are not overwhelmed by the love which is so much greater than we perceive. And then also we can use the prayer while we look to the end of the sacred way. We can ask to be made ready for the vision of God; yes, ready, prepared by means of these very graces and gifts which make beautiful our most ordinary days. Hence it becomes not only an aspiration, but also an act whereby we renew all our purpose of love, and brace ourselves anew for the difficulties of the way.

How wondrously glad our days may become, even though they appear outwardly troubled. Such strong movements of love from God to the soul, and from the soul to Him again, are not hindered by the things

we suffer. Who could fail of this gladness of soul whose one thought is of God and the perfecting of love with Him? Who could fail of it when the touch of His love wakens the soul to longing which is ever being satisfied with some glimpse of the glory, the beauty, the perfections of God? Why is any soul a stranger to this joy? Is it not within our own power to rise with renewed courage of pure love to run in the way before us, the way that leadeth to the vision we desire, yea, to God Who is our sole Desire?

O Lord God, Eternal Love, Who art to Thy Saints revealed in the glory of Thy perfections; be to us also, we pray Thee, the satisfaction both of those desires which we now bring to Thee, and also of every longing felt by those who love Thee; and grant that through Thine Own inspiration all our desires and longings may be worthy of Thy love; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth One God for ever. Amen.

IX

Hidden Glories

“He said, Thou canst not see My face : for there shall no man see Me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock : And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by : And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts : but My face shall not be seen.”—Exod. xxxiii. 20–23.

“No man hath seen God at any time ; the Only Begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”—S. John i. 18.

“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”—S. John xiv. 6.

“God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”—2 Cor. iv. 6.

THE sacred way is the way of confident love. We are in no doubt of the end. We *“shall see the King in His beauty.”* We shall adore the Eternal God. With the holy Angels we shall look upon Him ; for we are to be made equal unto them.¹ All this we are

¹ S. Luke xx. 36.

assured of. And yet, in meditation upon this experience of Moses, we are arrested by the fact that the Divine Majesty is so gloriously beautiful, so awe-inspiring, so inconceivably holy, that man, as he is, could not behold it and live. How then are we able to contemplate it and not be discouraged? Simply because through all that so transcends our thought, and forbids the approach of sin-tainted nature, there is the sweet attraction of the pure loveliness of God, the fact of His love compelling love. In that fact of love consists all the possibility and assurance of sanctity, and the removal of all that now prevents our seeing. Love purifying and strengthening exalts the soul within the light of its own glory, and the glory of eternal love is the essential glory of God.

The more we are attracted by, and held within, the love, the more conscious may we be of the destruction or removal of that which hinders. We may trace this inner working of love in the example before us. When at the first God manifested His Presence before the Israelites on Mount Sinai, "*so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.*"¹ But afterwards, when the first forty days had passed, and he had gone up again to the mountain to intercede for the erring and disobedient people, moved by Divine love to an act of heroic self-effacement,² and had been accepted, he could approach his Lord with the confidence born of love: "*I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.*" So may we be sure of the effect of love within our own souls. Our power to behold the pure majesty of God increases with the growth of

¹ Heb. xii. 21.

² Exod. xxxii. 31, 32.

love; and God will always reveal so much of Himself as we can bear. In this tender consideration of our weakness we find the proof of His ultimate purpose. He will fully reveal Himself when the soul is sufficiently strong in love; but we cannot by any act of our own force a way to the vision. As the bound was set about the mountain to restrain the people, as yet unprepared to approach God, so there is a bound beyond which no one may pass except they love. There must be no rashness on our part, no presumption, but the submission of love in profoundest reverence to Him Whom above all we desire to know.

Let us, then, consider further this experience of Moses. “*He said, Thou canst not see My face : for there shall no man see Me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock : And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by : And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts : but My face shall not be seen.*” There is a glory which man could not behold, and a joy so intense in seeing God, that man could not experience it and live. There is a glory which he may behold. That which may be seen, which was shown to Moses, was the glory of the Divine attributes. But even so we perceive that not even the full glory of these was beheld : “*Thou shalt see My back parts : but My face shall not be seen.*” Now we know that the attributes of God are not qualities superadded to His Nature : they are essential in Him, and He is perfectly manifested in each several attribute. Therefore their full

glory could not be seen by Moses. Their perfect radiance could be seen only in that transcendent glory which is referred to as the "*face*" of God. There is, therefore, a hidden glory which is the substance of all that can be known of any Divine attribute. When we may behold the perfect glory of love we shall find all the Divine attributes in their essential unity. They who at the last are counted worthy of the Beatific Vision will realize within their own beatitude the perfected capacity for joy in God, because of all their earlier response to the partial revelations vouchsafed to them. As often as in prayer we perceive the light of any perfection in God, we should respond with love, rejoicing with thanksgiving. Every such ray of Divine light is precious. It marks a step towards the fulness of the vision of which love assures us. But we must prepare to receive all such graces in God's way. It is of the utmost importance that we receive them after the manner which is here most clearly indicated. The passage is, indeed, of great importance, as we shall presently discover.¹

The central truth which is here revealed is that of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and that only through Him may we approach to behold the Divine glory. "*Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock : And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by.*" The Rock is Christ. As Moses was hidden within the cleft of the rock, so the soul that would perfectly know God must be in union with the Incarnate Lord, hidden within His Heart. This great Saint, this friend of

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle, xi. 6.*

God, must have perceived the mystic truth of this hiding in the rock. The coming of the Christ, His prophetic and priestly work, was understood by him, seen as it were afar off. He must, we think, have discerned the truth within the symbolism of divinely ordered service. Everything pointed to the Christ and to the needs of those who would come to Him. And it is significant that the necessity for union with Christ on the part of all who would attain to Heavenly knowledge, is so clearly shown in this very early mystical passage. Its importance at the present time can scarcely be overlooked. Just now mysticism is popular. Almost anything which, rightly or wrongly, goes by that name, is eagerly sought after; but it is often taught by those who have no love of Catholic truth; it is even presented as a substitute for the Catholic faith. But here is one, probably the greatest mystic of all time, declaring the simple gospel truth of union with Christ. And the Catholic to-day knows no other mysticism than that of which Jesus our Lord is the Centre and Life.

The great mystics among the Catholic Saints have been most wonderful in the simplicity of loving devotion to our Lord. There is nothing in their teaching, as there was nothing in their experience, that could be maintained apart from that faith and love of which He was the Object. It is true that very beautiful thoughts and aspirations are to be found in the writings of non-Christian mystics, and much that the Catholic can approve and admire; but he returns to his own life in Christ which assures him not merely of all that others have found, but of more. His is the clearness and certainty of truth, his the confident

hope, his the life already possessed; and all in Christ Who is *the Way, the Truth and the Life*.¹

This hiding of the faithful soul in Christ, the Rock, is beautifully developed in the Canticle, where it is regarded as a condition of highest communion. The soul in its prayer is raised to a very intimate communing with God in love. He even assures her of His regard and of the pleasure He takes in her devotion. If we may so express it, it is not the beholding of glory, but the very life within it, that is in the love of God, that we are made to understand. It marks a certain advance, or growth in interior graces. The soul is addressed as already abiding in the Rock: "*O My dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let Me see thy countenance, let Me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.*"²

"Here is the heart's true bulwark found,
And here is rest secure,
And here is love's most certain ground,
And here salvation sure.
In this cleft Rock, once rent for all,
And in this Heart's protecting wall,
May I confide, may I abide,
O Jesu, Saviour glorified."³

Here, then, is the same hiding of the soul in the Rock, only regarded as a more settled state. It implies a more developed experience of Christ, a more interior realization of love, a more perfect knowledge of Him. It is that knowledge and understanding of our Lord which is peculiarly catholic. There is the deep penetration of love into the mystery of the

¹ S. John xiv. 6.

² Cant. ii. 14.

³ Vide Littledale, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, p. 99.

Sacred Passion; there is the abiding in Christ by grace and love. There is, therefore, a recognition of the fruits of the Sacraments of the Gospel. It is that reality of love, of peculiar confidence in Divine love, which finds its perfect expression in catholic devotion. The saintly mystic of those bygone days who penned the *Canticle*, was moved by the very love by which we too enter into the Rock and in the Heart of Jesus find the treasure of life.

In each of these passages concerning the Rock, within which the soul must be hidden in order to receive Divine communications, there is the thought of hidden glory. Moses cannot look upon the face of God, but he must be hidden in the clift of the rock while the glory passes by. The Bride hides, and that so really, that she needs to be called to action by the Beloved. His love is more than she can bear until His voice awakens her. The full glory of His love is beyond her, even though she is held within His Heart. This is the truth we perceive for ourselves as we enter the inner way of union with our Lord. His Sacred Humanity is a veiling and hiding of His majesty and power. It is a source of deep joy to us, because in His Self-communication the veil does not conceal as with a dark covering; but rather tempers His glory to our spiritual gaze. There is a present vision which yet reminds us of hidden glory; but it is itself so restful and so full that we cannot be discouraged because we see so little, for we see in the perfections of our Lord the evidence of the glory that excelleth, and know that His love makes even that the substance of the hope which He inspires.

What does all this teach us? Is it not that we

must follow on in simple love as He leads us step by step towards the full light of His glory? Is it not that we should train ourselves in the way of spiritual concentration? Simple love. Spiritual concentration. We have not thought much about them, for so much of our life is distractive. But progress in the sacred way leads to them inevitably. The Beloved Himself warns us that the way is narrow; but the very truth of His words is not all at once apprehended. We are taught by experience. For the individual who would walk securely and with confidence, there is but one way, he must follow simply in the footsteps of the Beloved. Much that to others appears both desirable and lawful, must be left, set aside, by him if he would follow in obedience to the inward voice. His Lord is calling him. A new sense awakens. The way lengthens in spiritual beauty and yet the track narrows with the distance. He must follow His Lord alone, content to be alone with Him.

Progress in the sacred way is checked when the interior call or admonition is not heeded. Some, we know, may hesitate, fearing to be presumptuous. But we have the spiritual gift of Holy Fear which should restrain our pride and keep us both humble and reverent. And we make a great mistake if we suppose response to be any other than the answer of love to love, and that in the simplest way alike in prayer and in the external business of life. It may lead to very high things and to wonderful graces, but the steps of our ascent are not steep; they raise us almost imperceptibly. We need only fixity of purpose in holy love as we go forward.

Thus in simplicity of love, and spiritual concentra-

tion we are to tread the way with our Lord. They who truly love will need no further explanation. We know it as an imperative call of love, or not at all. But think what this close following of Him implies. The mere mention of it strikes a note of severity, and may even provoke opposition; for some will regard it as not only unearthly, but non-human. Such judgement, however, is based upon considerations not yet freed from worldly, or selfish influence. The truth is that they who obey the higher call find a new richness of life and a finer inspiration. What is the purpose of the Divine call? It must have a definite bearing upon the revelation of the Divine glory. And so indeed we prove. No one can live in union with our Lord by grace, and still more by love, without perceiving at least some indications of that Divine glory. We cannot know Him and be in ignorance of His will and purpose of love. He attracts us to the vision and the glory. Through the perfections of His Sacred Humanity we gaze into the deep glory of those attributes which were proclaimed to Moses. We see "*the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*"¹

Thus, through an experience which at first seems too high for us to contemplate, we are taught the simplest truth for our guidance in daily life. The life in Christ is everything. It is at once the simplest fact and most profound truth of our spiritual state. Within it we experience both the ordinary working of grace, and also the highest movements of love of which we are capable. It is the spring of all devotion and effort in the sacred way—that way which is so often dull, so shadowed, wherein we complain and grow

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

weary, not thinking of the nearness of the vision, and passing by the means of learning and of knowing. If we fully live up to the ideal which grows clearer as the Beloved is known through love, the greatness of our future must attract us. The light of the glory of God disperses the shadows. We can be brave to go forward, for we are in Him Who is to us light and life and love.

Brave to go forward—yes, we can be brave in the deep, holy consciousness of God with us. But with this encouraging sense of all that He is to us, we must not forget that His strength is ever greatest in those who are wholly surrendered to Him, whose care is to correspond in themselves to His revealed purpose of love, to meet His gift and revelation with the most holy desire of which we are capable; yea, *to be* all that love makes possible, and that for the satisfaction of His desire. He gives to us all that is possible, and promises ever richer gifts and higher knowledge. He has brought us into union with the Heart of Jesus that we may be taught in the intimacy of love the higher truths of His Being and power. Well may we contemplate the depth and fulness of this wondrous love. What, then, can we say, what can we do? The longing to be, to become, must be strong indeed within us. Like S. Teresa we may cry: “What can *I* be for *Thee*, O my God? What can a soul do for Thee which is given to such evil habits as mine, except love the graces Thou hast given it? What service canst Thou hope for on my part?”¹

This is what we feel, joy in the Gift of God, and a longing to glorify Him by love is checked by a remem-

¹ S. Teresa, *Minor Works*, p. 164.

brance of our faultiness and frailty; but let us not hesitate to give to the uttermost in love to Him Who so loves us. Our response will be met with a yet further proof of His love in the strength He will impart, enabling us to advance along the way of His Own Self-revelation. Let us ask to be confirmed in what He has already given, for in every Divine gift consists the power both to do and to win in the higher paths of the spiritual life, to advance with holier confidence along the sacred way.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who art the Brightness of the Father's glory, and through Whom its light is shed upon our souls; enable us so truly to abide in Thee in the union of love, that we may both rejoice in the knowledge of it here, and also have hope of its fruition in the life to come; Who livest and reignest with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, God for ever and ever. Amen.

X

The Power to Behold

“And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock : And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by : And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts : but My face shall not be seen.”—Exod. xxxiii. 21–23.

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”—Ps. xci. 1.

GOD delights to reveal His love. The revelation of His love appears to be His ultimate purpose in the visions of His glory vouchsafed to His Saints. Whatever be the general purpose, or the immediate call or impression, there is an inner grace, which should be very lasting in its effect, consisting in a most peaceful apprehension of Divine love. After all the wonders of vision and of supernatural manifestation there comes the gentle, subduing, penetrating movement of love.¹ This leading into the heart of love may be observed as a feature of every true vision of God; and they who receive such graces know the tenderness of that interior revelation and touch of Divine love.

¹ Cf. 1 Kings xix.

In the mystical experience which was God's answer to Moses when he prayed, "*I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory,*" we trace this very clearly. We find it as a revelation of love in the union of the soul with Christ, the Rock. He was first of all taught the necessity for that union, and then was taken into it by the simple action of love. Thus he who was blessed in beholding afar off the glory of the Christ, was enabled mystically to enter into the peace and love of His Sacred Heart.

"*I . . . will cover thee with My hand while I pass by.*" Thus was Moses mystically taken and hidden within the heart of Christ. The covering with the hand of God completed his concealment. What an experience! To lie beneath the hand of God: can we think of it? We may think of the soul shrinking within the sense of its own nothingness, and yet experiencing a marvellous peace, and melting with the sweetness of love in unimagined pureness of joy. The hand of God is infinitely tender as He touches the soul He loves; and to Moses it must have been a revelation all the more striking by comparison with the scenes of awful majesty which he had previously witnessed on the Mount. But the terrors of God subside, and are hidden in the gentleness of His love.

Covered with the hand of God, Moses was taken and held within the very life the glory of which he might not behold. It was an experience of intensest love, of love which empowered him. We might suppose as we contemplate the facts that Moses could have desired nothing better than to remain immersed in that love. But when God so fills the soul with

His love in this life, it is not the consummation of our spiritual experience, but rather a step forward by which He leads us into the fuller knowledge of Himself. And with that fulness of love there is given strength. It was so with Moses. The hand which covered him conveyed the strength, and quickened the whole man, so that he was able to see the “*back parts*”; that is, so much of the glory of God as might be perceived by a soul in conscious union with Christ. That glorious gospel truth of the mutual indwelling of the soul and the Beloved through the great Sacrament of His Body and Blood seems to be here implied, as we shall see.

The taking away of the hand marked the moment of perception. “*I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts.*” It was then that Moses saw and heard; and he did so with quickened powers of soul. No one can experience the Divine love in the higher degrees without being quickened in all his powers, though it be a truth not very generally understood. We think if it were more widely perceived and accepted there would be greater enthusiasm in the practice of religion, and a more simple intention in devotion on the part of Catholics. As a truth it affects us directly in prayer and in the use we make of the Sacraments. Before all things we are concerned, both in prayer and Sacraments, with the working of love; and we know nothing of their joy and power until we have found in them the treasures of Divine love. We are not surprised, therefore, to find in this revelation to Moses on Sinai a foreshadowing both of Sacraments and prayer as the Saints have known them.

1. There is a clear intimation of the truth concerning the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar in particular.

Let us contemplate the Blessed Sacrament. There is an awful reality veiled beneath the sacramental species. Our Lord Beloved is there, in the fulness of living power, in the wonder of His love. Mystically obedient unto death, He comes to be our life, to abide in us, to be in us life of our life, the spring and source of all power within us. We worship, we adore. But we do more : we receive Him, He receives us, takes us to His Heart, covers us, as it were, with His hand. We see not His glory, we behold not His face. But His glory is there ; His face is towards us while He covers our eyes. Could we more simply submit to His sacramental touch, so as to know ourselves beneath His hand, we should experience a degree of rapture not altogether unlike that in which the soul of Moses was transported. The moments are brief during which we make our Communions. They often seem too short for one who would perfectly and with generous love appreciate the reception of those spotless mysteries ; but we might do more to deepen the wonderful and holy consciousness of the moment by bringing to it a truer concentration of mind. We might approach the Altar with profounder self-humbling, for we cannot enter the Heart of Jesus while the heart within us is full of pride. We might approach our Lord with more perfect submission. We should not fail to perceive far more than we do of the love within which He would hide us.

And then having made our Communion we might be more interiorly recollected. We might more simply abide in the silence of love, and fear to lose any part

of the blessing and the joy by permitting idle thoughts and words. Ours should be a consciousness of a Divine reality which has not only been presented to us, but which has also passed into us. He Whom we adored is now in us and we are in Him. He has covered us with the shadow of His hand and all our being has melted into His in the tremendous fact of sacramental union.

But we go on to contemplate the passing of the glory. We have made our Communion. The Mass is over. The glory has passed by. We look up to contemplate afresh that which may be seen by us in the Sacred Humanity of our Lord; for our Communions should lead to this. He Who has come to us is the Eternal God Whose glory we long to see, Whose face as yet we may not look upon. But that glory has passed us by, He came near, laid His hand upon us, hiding the glory, but letting the love that burns enter our hearts; and we have felt its warmth and power, our own hearts are burning too, and while the flame of love rises in its own clearness within us, we can know, we can perceive and rejoice in the revelation which follows. We have been strengthened for the vision by the Sacrament which veiled it. We have been endued with power to behold.

But let us try to understand this power. It is given not for the moment only, but rather as an endowment for after days. It is given with a definite assurance of increase. There is first the certain increase through frequent Communion; and also that which follows always upon the right use of God's gifts. And the proper increase of power through frequent Communion is conditioned by the use we make

of it. It is not a power which gathers force or intensity while yet unused; not a power to be realized at the moment of a sudden flashing forth of the glory of God; but a power to behold, to contemplate, the growing and increasing beauty of that revelation of Himself which God will unfold to His Own. It is the power whereby day by day we may see the deep significance of every sacred impression, of every intuition of holiness, which God may grant to us.

All this may be ours as we correspond in love to the love of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

We pass now to the consideration of hiding by the hand of God as it may be experienced in prayer. I am assuming that prayer is given its rightful place as the work of love, that it is something more than the recitation of vocal prayers. Mental prayer is here particularly referred to. Prayer in this higher sense is absolutely essential to the soul's life in God. Without it we cannot be said properly to know Him. Love must become poor and weak without it; for love requires the communion of the lover and the loved. The higher experiences of souls which are commonplaces with the Saints are not met with where there is no practice of the higher ways of prayer, for there is not a sufficiently clear perception of spiritual things, nor is there a right understanding of the mutual relation between God and the soul. Much, therefore, that is taught concerning the higher degrees of devotion is to them strange or unreal. The loss to them is great while they continue in their present way, and are satisfied with rules of daily prayer which make the least possible demand upon their time and energy. Very many with a little more effort might attain

to far greater richness of spiritual life, and enjoyment of catholic privilege, and above all to a more perfect understanding of their life in God.

2. We will now consider this action of God in relation to our prayer.

Beneath the hand of God Moses was not only hidden, but restrained. He was not free, he could not act in accordance with natural impulses. For him the only course was that of absolute submission. This, we may believe, was not difficult, because of the great love which both held and inspired him. In that act of submission he proved his own love and attained to the strength which we have already noticed. He must have proved what we need also to prove for ourselves, that the Divine restraint is a most blessed action of God upon the soul whom He is guiding to great things in the spiritual way. He would deliver the soul from the weakening effects of self-assurance. He would render it passive beneath His hand, only in order to effect His Own purpose of love unhindered. He has great grace to bestow, truths to reveal, love to declare, for all of which He requires simplicity in the soul, and profound humility. To us it is not always clear that humility is the indispensable virtue in the soul that aspires to great things; but God cannot accomplish His work in us, and particularly in the higher degrees of prayer, if we are not humble. The more profound the sense of our own nothingness, the more surely can He work His will in us.

The truth of this will be evident to all who will examine their own experiences in prayer. It is strange how much of self-love, and proud resistance,

we show in our prayer, often without perceiving that we are in opposition to God. It arises partly from ignorance, no doubt; but also from unwillingness to accept the assurance of our teachers. We are not always ready to give up our own way in our prayers. In fact we are inclined to be more wilful about them than most other things. We think we understand ourselves better than our directors who would regulate our prayers according to principles with which we are not familiar. But really there is nothing in our lives which calls for such careful consideration, and patient submission to instruction, as our prayer. There is no safety in any self-chosen path. We must follow the way of the Saints; and it is encouraging to know that they speak with one voice. Widely separated from one another both in space and time, their experiences were alike. The way of the Holy Spirit is the same in all ages. He teaches us to pray, and His discipline is the same for all.

In this experience of Moses there is to be observed the restraining hand of God. The servant of God was not merely hidden, but held; and it is of this holding of the soul in the time of prayer that I would speak now.

If we persevere in prayer we shall certainly make progress. The higher degrees are accessible to us; but not without the certainty of discipline. We shall encounter difficulty, and probably have already done so. And one almost certain difficulty consists in this: that we are unable to do as we would in our prayer. We would delight in intellectual freedom in our prayer; but instead we are strangely dull and stupid. We want to make particular acts; and we

cannot make even one with satisfaction. We long for inspiring devotional thoughts; and we feel only aridity and poverty. Our prayer time seems all a waste of opportunity, and it is hard to be patient with what we imagine to be our own weakness. So far from being able to receive the holy impressions which at other times have delighted us, we are only conscious of weakness in repelling suggestions and distractions from without. We struggle, but to no purpose. We are exhausted by vain attempts to force the current of our thoughts. We are distressed, and inclined to despair of our state, and to doubt the love of God. How can we find comfort in such experience?

First of all by ceasing to oppose ourselves to it. Instead of wrestling with the force which holds us, let us with quiet love give ourselves to endure. But we can do more than endure. Love which is capable of accepting the hardness will enable us to find a new way of self-oblation, will teach us some very blessed truth, or lead us to some hidden sweetness through the prayer of submission. But what is the simple truth concerning our state which can assure us of results so satisfactory? We must recognize the hand of God. That hand which hides the soul from the effulgence of God's Own glorious Presence, now in this state of prayer restrains it. Let us acknowledge the restraint; and just as we may be in peace and joy beneath the hiding of His hand, so now we may remain in the silence of loving submission beneath the restraint of His hand.

When we know that our inability to pray as we would, and make acts of devotion according to our

wont, *is not a fault in is*, but an experience of God's Own working within us, we can readily submit ourselves to His will. Perhaps the simplest response on our part may be made silently, as we lovingly rest beneath His hand in simple attention. The silence of the soul which this pre-supposes is not idleness, but rather a simple movement of love; and being love it is accepted and blessed. If we attempt to break that silence by any forced act, or repetition of well-known forms of prayer, we shall not benefit at all, but rather lose by it; while simple words of love, or the holy Name of Jesus, welling up from the depths of our consciousness, will assist us and relieve the soul in its desire to express itself in love. It is then better to ignore as far as possible all suggestions and intrusions of other thoughts which tend only to distraction. These will come without doubt; but we should pay no heed to them. Our care must be to remain willing and submissive beneath the hand of God so long as it pleases Him to hold us in this way of restraint.

But the question arises: *Why* does God thus discipline the soul which only desires to be occupied in prayer? In the first place, we must recognize that He is not checking our prayer, but directing it. We must not resist His action.¹ We are not less occupied in prayer because our own wishes are restrained. We have but to yield ourselves to Him, knowing His love is the restraining power that we feel. He can do nothing which is opposed to love. Then, further, we may find a direct answer to our question. God thus disciplines the soul He loves to teach us to for-

¹ See Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, xiv. 37.

sake ourselves in order that we may find Him in the fulness of His Self-revelation. This was the purpose of His dealing with Moses. It is His purpose in all such seasons of restraint in our own lives. We may be sure that He does nothing without reason or necessity. If in His loving desire towards us He seeks opportunity to make Himself more perfectly known by us, what wonder is it if He brings the soul through discipline to the required fitness? Shall we not willingly submit, and lovingly ask Him to work His will?

Another reason may possibly be admitted. We know that God works secretly in the soul He loves, and that the soul itself cannot follow, or even know, all He is doing. May there not be a need of some hidden perfection, deeper and more interior than even that humility which His action fosters in us? May it not be that He requires this before He can impart the perfect knowledge of Himself? All experience, all reflection upon the ways of God with those whom He destines to great holiness, points to this working for interior and hidden perfection. "*Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*"¹ We may, therefore, assume the Divine care to this end in those times of restraint from which we would fain be free that we may follow our own way.

Sooner or later the hand will be removed. The power of expression in our prayer will be restored, and with it a new and very clear discernment of heavenly truths. God's way will be justified. We

¹ Ps. li. 6.

shall be wise if we treasure the experience through which we have passed as not the least among the many mercies of God. The steps of the sacred way are traced in prayer, and there are surprises for the soul in its progress; but there are none greater than those awakenings which lead to the understanding of God and the ways of His love, after a season of heaviness and distress when we have felt we could not pray.

O Almighty God, through Whose tender discipline we are delivered from the pride of our hearts, and attracted to the grace of true humility; Assist us in our prayer, restrain those desires which are not Thine Own in us, direct our aspirations, and make us so truly one with Thyself in the impulses of love, that we may delight in the submission of ourselves wholly to Thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

XI

The Hour of Weakness

"My heart is sore pained within me : and the terrors of Death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove ! for then would I fly away and be at rest."—Ps. lv. 4-6.

"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord : be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart : wait, I say, on the Lord."—Ps. xxvii. 13, 14.

"My grace is sufficient for thee : for My strength is made perfect in weakness."—2 Cor. xii. 9.

WHO has not known the hour of weakness? In the sacred way we shall not find any who have not at some time or other realized their own weakness. Even the bravest, even those whom God has exalted in love, and who have travelled far along the way, are overtaken at times with fear of themselves in their weakness. It is one of the trials of our way, and the enemy of souls is not slow to make it not only hard, but also so secret and subtle, that we may not even suspect his working. But as in all other temptations, so in this, there is a way of escape, and it leads to power.

That consciousness of weakness which we must now consider is not the early feeling of surprise or fear which marked our first steps in the sacred way. It is true we realized to some extent the greatness of that high emprise which drew us on; and we asked: Am I sufficient for all that is before me? But we were enthusiastic and hopeful, and we conquered our fears. The sense of weakness which follows upon experience in the sacred way is wholly different. It springs from profound and humbling self-knowledge, when we see ourselves, when there is nothing of false beauty to deceive us, when nothing remains of the glamour we once took for reality, when the face of truth, divinely lovely as it is, seems only to reproach us, and when the way appears hopeless. Then is our bitter hour of weakness—but, thank God, it is an hour through which we may pass to great things, in it we may die and rise again to new life and power.

Such a time of weakness may be experienced when we awake to the fact of some great mistake in life, some unwise action which has resulted in humiliation and loss to our souls; when our eyes have been opened to the worthlessness of all we have done, or desired, or sought; when we feel powerless before the vision of ourselves. Some have to meet even this. It is their hour of weakness, an hour of silent distress and bitter self-accusing. And it is well to permit ourselves, if such be our own trouble, to look at the dark vision with determination to see the worst, to lose nothing of its revelation; for in so doing we shall see beneath the unloveliness of our unfamiliar selves, the features of a better self. That is God's Own show-

ing and we must hasten to identify ourselves with it. In so doing we shall begin that fresh ascent in true life upon which depends that very sainthood to which we are called. We shall not be afraid if we have understood aright our experience of weakness; for the humble soul is ever the bravest. Self-confidence will give place to quiet assurance as we trust the love that guides us.

Again, the weakness may be felt in some hour of awful sorrow, when all that made life worth living, all that imparted light and colour to our days, has been taken away; when life for us has taken an abrupt turning, and we are afraid to look along the untrodden way; when we feel too weak to contemplate the fact of loneliness with all its yet unmeasured grief. We realize our weakness then within the consciousness of inexpressible loneliness. We live within the sorrow and no other soul can either feel its pain or penetrate its secret. The more truly we love the more awful is the suffering; and we are weak until love finds its power again in the will to suffer. And then there rises for us, through the very mist of tears it may be, a new vision of love, strong, beautiful—yea, transcendently lovely in its selflessness. It is the vision of the self ennobled by love made pure.

In some degree the sense of weakness which is in part the result of sickness of the body, may affect us also in spiritual ways. The weary body, hardly for a moment free from the restlessness of pain, does not respond to the call of the spirit. It may be that we must yield to the claims of the body; but the weakness of soul which we feel need not make us fretful. There is strength to be sought and found

in silence while our whole being lies in stillness before God. Our very weakness, our helplessness, allied with love appeals to His love. We may not wholly apprehend what is passing within, but something there is which speaks of hidden power, and freshness of life, and we should rest in it.

But we know that all such suffering and weakness, affecting the inner life as they do, are yet not to be reckoned the greatest of spiritual trials. Apart from them and in more interior ways we must be prepared to suffer. In the course of spiritual development we approach the deeper sufferings of the Saints, and experience in some degree the very trials through which they passed so gloriously. Thus it happens to us if we have been faithful, and courageous in love, under earlier trials of the sacred way; for they who are called to great suffering in spirit have already been proved in lesser ways. We may be brought to nothing, we may be stripped, as it were, in spirit, deprived of all we once rejoiced in; the memory may fail and all that we have ever accomplished, ever learned, ever received, may appear as though it had not been. The cry of the Saints may best express our own nothingness and weakness: "*I was brought to nothing and I knew not.*" The soul that is thus so painfully conscious of its weakness is, nevertheless, very strong in grace. It has grace to support its weakness, and love which rests only in God. It feels not its own power and will not trust itself away from God. In this it is safe, and above all is very pleasing to God.

It may be in none of these ways that we are most conscious of our weakness; but in some way we cannot speak of. It is to us an hour of suffering in spirit,

when we go into ourselves and view the poverty within; when we cannot trace it to any cause but to our own strange ineptitude, to days when we knew to do good and did it not; when we were easily content, slumbering in false security. And now we feel our weakness and know that we alone are to blame. We are humiliated within our own consciousness. The hopelessness which suggests itself intensifies both the weakness and the pain. But even thus we dare not give way. There is that within our inmost sense which forbids the despair which like a threatening cloud hangs upon our spiritual horizon. It is in the trial of love that we understand the sinfulness of despair. When we are thus made to see ourselves in the light of God, there is a very wonderful attendant grace. It is nothing less than an action of Divine love which makes the vision of sainthood clearer as the soul is encouraged to look upon its own imperfections. When we know them, and can humbly aspire to all that love reveals, we begin to be strong. We can climb again.

Our conscious weakness may lead also to real loss to others. From the painful sense of our weakness may arise the fear to undertake any of the work which is called for in the world. We may shrink from the certain call implied in some of the holiest revelations we receive. "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" We are afraid to say, "*Here am I, send me.*"¹ We confuse the proper action of humility with the hesitation of fear. If we have not the strong ready love of Isaiah, let us hope to have the strong humility of Gideon: "*The Lord looked upon*

¹ Isa. vi. 8.

*him and said, Go in this thy might."*¹ If God sees in us that which justifies His call, there is also in us, we may be sure, that which justifies our own reply, "*Here am I.*" It is that weakness in which God will perfect His Own strength. Indeed it is the soul whom He is leading in the sacred way, that He calls to serve Him in the world. He charges them with a mission because of His gifts to them, because He loves them and knows their love. It is, therefore, needful to discern as clearly as we can between the weakness of the soul that fails through fear, and that weakness which through the soul's humility becomes strength.

All these are possible experiences of weakness—soul-weakness—and it is well we should feel it. It is one of God's Own acts of mercy towards us. In His love for us He permits it; but never Himself forsaking the soul in its suffering. If He were to leave us in that hour we should yield all too readily to despair. But I think He never permits its worst pain to any who are not already sufficiently strong in love and faith, souls He can trust, souls who will become the purer for the testing.

What then? The hour of weakness is never to become the hour of despair, or of self-pity; it is never to be spent by us in uttering the complaints of wounded self-love. It is rather the hour of opportunity which, to souls in the sacred way, should lead to definite results. We should show ourselves worthy of our trials, and so become greater in soul and readier in sympathy.

The hour of weakness is the hour wherein strong souls may sink into their own nothingness, to rise

¹ Judges vi. 14.

again in the power of God. "*My strength is made perfect in weakness.*"¹ And we are to prove this. We are to know our weakness, but never to plead that we are incapable. That is the danger of the hour. Some there are who at once refuse to make an effort. "*I cannot,*" they say; and immediately they assume an end to responsibility. But this is wrong. It is even sinful; for it is directly opposed to the clear witness of conscience. They know, but refuse the higher way. The weakness we feel is within ourselves alone; and God is eternal strength: "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" Here is the human soul conscious alike of its own weakness and of the Divine power.

Let us acknowledge our weakness and nothingness; but let us not regard the hour of our suffering in any way but that of calm waiting upon God in expectation. Before us is the ascending path of the Saints. By it we may attain to the vision and the glory. The mountain to which we aspire rises from the valley of our own nothingness and pain. The ascent must begin when we stand. If we are at the lowest step, then the next, if we will, may be the beginning of our ascent. At that point we may begin to assert our strength. This is our hope, our comfort. At the lowest step of all we find One with outstretched hands, strong hands of love, waiting to take us to Himself, to guide and uphold, and we are no longer afraid. As we yield ourselves to Him the past with its weakness is left. Then we leave our self-will, our pride, content in our humility to rest on the outstretched arm, and to follow with the Beloved in the upward way. We

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

could not follow it with the past yet clinging to us, with the pride of past achievements still upon us. They would make us weak again; yea, they would even cause us to fall in the very ascent which Divine love has set before us. And so in humility of weakness we are to be surrendered to God Who will array us in strength.

I say, humility of weakness; and yet there is within it the hopefulfulness of love, yea, the certainty of love; for, as we have seen, God permits this hour of weakness to those in whom is yet love and faith. Let us assert them. Faith will assure us, love will empower us. As we look out in contemplation of the way, and behold that which God reveals and assures, faith gives reality, and love makes them our own. What do we behold? There is something in every case set over against the shadow of our own weakness; the attraction of some higher thought, the ray of a new hope, the clearness of a spiritual call, and our safety, yea, it may be, our whole future of spiritual development depends upon the strength of our response.

In our hour of most bitter self-accusing there may be a revelation of the better self, the self that God sees and loves. Because He loves that self which we have obscured by our own mistakes and follies, we must love it too, love it for His sake. We must want to preserve for Him that which He loves, and find our own happiness in becoming that in which He can eternally rejoice.

The vision of love which parts even the very clouds of sorrow may inspire us with fresh courage. The weakness we experience under physical suffering may

lead to a very holy sense of life and power in God. The suffering of soul which may be our portion, the spiritual discipline which shapes us according to the loving desire and will of God, may lead to clear intuitions of holiness, and excite in us most pure aspirations. The deep realization of our own nothingness and poverty of spirit may prepare us most wonderfully for the possession of the riches of God. In all these ways the hour of weakness may pass into a calm and holy peace, wherein we shall realize a new power, or rather we shall realize the power which is properly our own, seeing that we are loved of God : our own strength, but increased to a supernatural degree by Divine encouragement. How tremendous are the issues of the hour of weakness ! They depend upon the soul's action, upon its willing response to the generous love of God. Whatever is presented us, held out to the grasp of love and faith, we must hasten to make it our own. The light which pierces the shadows of our hour of weakness is the coming of the dawn of a new day into which we run with a fresh realization of *life*. The sacred way becomes once more the way of freedom and holy confidence : "*I will walk at liberty when Thou hast enlarged my heart.*"

All this is true of souls, many of whom are sadly discouraged, and tempted to forsake the way of the Saints. And many, too, are afraid to attempt anything which may lead to spiritual suffering. But if, with their hearts intent upon the good which God will ever keep within their view, they will go forward they need not fear the hour of weakness. As we have seen, at its worst, that is when we must blame

ourselves alone, and trace it to some error and fault in ourselves, God makes plain the way to some higher achievement. The hour of weakness becomes to the faithful soul the hour of strength. In perfected sainthood is to be sought and found the gain of our hardest experiences. Many are they who in this very time have their own dark hours. True as this may be at any time, it is even now especially true. The horrors of war, and all that war has imposed upon the world and upon the Church, will have resulted in unexpected spiritual trials. The unspeakable anguish of souls agonizing in secret, the cry which none but the Holy Ghost can interpret, the grief which through pathos and tragedy has revealed the almost divine greatness of souls—all these bear witness to the hours of weakness wherein souls have been new born to strength and have lived again in the power of God.

But, no doubt, there are for the many, perhaps for us all, experiences through which we must pass in full consciousness of our own weakness. We may be tempted to wish we had not been born for such days as these. That again is weakness. Great times should produce great souls—yea, Saints. If we are called to live and work, to suffer and win, in an age wherein a great past gives birth to a greater future, then we must desire to become worthy of that age. Through all the strangeness of evil, through all mystery of pain, there glows a light which reveals life in its wonder and glory. Is it but the vision of a moment, lost again in the shadows of evil? It is the light, it is the life, which to God is ever clear, and to which He is exalting His Own.

His Own! Whose are we? If we are His, all His is ours. The light, the life, the glory—all are ours in Him. And not even our darkest hours are so dark that love and faith may not pierce beyond their gloom. Love is strong; it is divine; and through the hour of our human weakness endures but to win by eternal, unconquerable power.

The future will justify the present. “*The Day will declare it.*” There is awaiting us all that will explain the meaning of our hours of weakness; all that we could not, in the very nature of things, know or perhaps even bear in this time. When in His great mercy God shows us the meaning in the depths of His love, we shall be glad to have been permitted to endure the hour of weakness, for within it is being gathered up much that will only be fully understood as we learn, through the changefulness of present trials, the truth of those attributes of God which we have yet to consider.

O Almighty Lord God, Whose power upholdest all things, and Whose strength is the support of Thy children; draw nigh to us in the humiliation of our weakness, to raise us to a joyous sense of Thy strength made perfect in us; and let Thy blessing restore us to confident peace in Thy love; through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth for ever. Amen.

XII

Divine Attributes (1)

“And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the Name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”—Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6.

“Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.”—Ps. lxxxvi. 15.

“All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.”—Ps. xxv. 10.

“With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.”—Ps. cxxx. 7.

“O Lord God of Hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee? or to Thy faithfulness round about Thee?”—Ps. lxxxix. 8.

MOSES had desired to see the glory of God. He was permitted to see but little; but he was given to understand much. The Divine proclamation conveyed to his understanding more than would perhaps have been possible for him to receive through a mere vision of glory. God gave what was best; that is, what was most necessary at the time. So would He advance the soul of His servant, developing his life interiorly, and laying down the rule for all who

would attain to the Beatific Vision. It is necessary first to understand, and then we shall be raised to the vision. It is to be noticed also that not all was here proclaimed of God which might have been proclaimed of Him. There is no limit to the majesty and glory of God, but there is a limit to our capacity for knowing Him. All that He revealed to Moses, or has ever revealed to His Saints, is less than He is in Himself, or to Himself. They have received so much as they were prepared for. This is an important point. We receive as we are prepared in love; God Himself assisting the soul, giving a divine intelligence according to the capacity of our understanding, and communicating love according to the utmost freedom of our will.¹

Our ignorance of God is, to some extent at least, our condemnation. If we were more careful to train ourselves in prayer, more patient and persevering in love, we should certainly be led more deeply in the ways of Divine knowledge. Let us prepare in love, and wait upon God. His blessing will not be withheld, even though He test by discipline the longing of our hearts.

God admits the soul in union with Him to a certain knowledge and understanding of Himself, permits it to behold in Him not only the beauty of the several attributes of His majesty and holiness, but also their unity. It is then of first importance to aspire to the greatest possible purity and strength of love, that we may be ready at the moment He wills to declare Himself.² And, moreover, we are never to

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, *The Living Flame*, i. 18.

² *Ibid.* iii.

suppose that we know Him yet in the perfection of even one attribute, for not only is the glory of each attribute beyond our present range of spiritual vision, but also it should be borne in mind that we cannot contemplate a single Divine attribute without regard to all.

We are familiar with the thought of these several Divine attributes proclaimed before Moses. They are inherent in our conception of God. They are essential to Christian teaching concerning Him. But to know them, as it was given to Moses to know them, belongs to the higher degree of love which in the sacred way is the desired attainment of the pilgrim. If we think we know them, we know them not yet as we ought to know them; and love will not be content with any distant perception of the glory of the Beloved. We love Him, and through many avenues of love's extension, through the manifoldness of love's experience, there come those holy and divinely sweet presentments, or showings of God, which develop our knowledge of Him in intimate and personal ways. He is revealed to those who love Him. We cannot by searching find Him out. Hence it is that simple and loving souls know Him, whilst learning without love avails nothing. The child may know him, and the man of the world be ignorant of Him.

Love reposes in contemplation of its object. The simplest soul will contemplate God, and increase in knowledge of Him, according to the measure of its love, and delight in Him though too conscious of His unspeakable greatness and beauty to say anything concerning Him. And the greatest souls will

be equally silent while yet they are filled with joy and held in holiest peace as they contemplate their Beloved. But through this contemplation both are being led to deeper realization of that which God is. To Moses had been granted many a glorious vision, and long had he contemplated the Divine majesty, the glory of Him Whom he loved, before he could appreciate the attributes which God at length revealed to Him. How he had been otherwise prepared in spirit through long years of toil and discipline, and deep communing with Nature and with God, we do not know; but of this we are sure, so great graces could not have been given to one unprepared and spiritually untrained. Many secrets of Divine love enriched his soul, and filled his heart, ere this revelation made their meaning clear.

Think of him in his contemplation of God. And what we understand of him is true likewise of all the Saints in their degree. He loved God. His whole being was awake and receptive with that receptiveness which is characteristic of love in its going forth to the One loved. For love in its going forth is ready to receive. Its receptivity is in proportion to its intensity and purity. The more perfect the object of love, the more is this perceived. So we think of Moses. The awe, the expectation, the thrill of the Divine contact, must have been in him as effects of Divine love quickening his own love in that very characteristic of receptivity, so that he was able to receive and understand the Divine proclamation. Remembering it was to him the mystic revelation of the Christ through Whom we all have access unto the Father, we must go further,

and say it was to him a wondrous Divine expansion of the thought and mystery of love; while to us it points the way to the soul's right response to the love of God in Christ, which as yet we so imperfectly know. Every word of the Divine proclamation is concerned with our own immediate relation to the Beloved, our Incarnate Lord.

The rapture which Moses experienced must have been so great that we marvel at the power of his body to support it. But we remember how his body had been sustained, and even transfigured, during his sojourn with God in the Mount. All that Divine operation was a preparation for this hour. It both made his love what it was, and also strengthened him for that which God would declare to him. When therefore the proclamation was made: "THE LORD! THE LORD GOD!" it must have been to Moses not the overpowering insistence of the Divine majesty in its unimagined glory and unendurable immensity, but rather the utterance of love which filled and held him within its own sweetness, a communication, a gift, a fact. He knew God, present in the might of love, enfolding him. The proclamation, whether audible or not, was the voice to which his whole self responded. It was love with the Beloved in the moment of perfect recognition.

It is to love that Divine love is revealed in its depth and height; and though we be never so far removed from the singular experiences of the great Saints, yet the knowledge we desire and seek will be found if we follow in their way of love. The sacred way is no other than the way of the Saints. Our first care should be to perfect our approach to God

in love, the absorbing love of the soul for the Beloved. As this love grows in strength and purity, and in holy desire towards Him, He will make Himself known. The attributes of His Divine Nature will be declared, we may say proclaimed, within the soul's consciousness. "*I know whom I have believed*" is the joyous truth which fills the soul who is so visited by Him.

God reveals Himself to the loving soul in a way that reassures it in its condition of trembling love. We must always feel the effects of sin in ourselves, and be conscious of our imperfections, when our sense of the Divine Presence is most real. We know how sharply defined our limitations appear when most we desire to contemplate more nearly the glory which is so near to us; so readily perceived by love. Rightly our first thought and act of love are expressed in penitence. We would "*look up,*" but we cannot as we would, for our sins have taken "*hold upon us.*" But love impels, and our feeling finds utterance in contrite devotion. We look into the depth of divinity to adore in penitence the Lord we love, and from whom not even our sins can avail to turn us. And from the deep majesty of love comes the first word—*God is merciful.*

How the thought must have arrested Moses. It was like a clear ray of light penetrating all the obscurities of sin, all the ignorance of God which through sin had deepened from age to age. How intensely beautiful to him must have been that mystic light in which he saw all this in the Person of the Incarnate Son. Mercy! God proclaims this attribute first, and thereby meets us in love, calming the fear of

the sin-stained soul. When we examine ourselves and endeavour to trace our sins, we discover the effects of ignorance and weakness, no less than the working of pride and malice; and we feel the need of being judged by One Who knows the *true* measure of our guilt. The standard of holiness is so high, the law of righteousness is inexorable; must we be judged only according to the strictness of that unbending code? "*If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.*"¹ Forgiveness, mercy! Mercy takes all things into account. Mercy is not the setting aside of justice, but rather the perfection and glory of justice. It breathes in the Divine proclamation, it lives in the activities of the Incarnate Son, it pleads from His Cross. From the inward distress of our souls, from the painful confusion within, we turn to him and in Him perceive the mercy which takes us up, and calms our fears, and sets us upon the step where we hear the word which quickly follows.

God is gracious. We are the objects not only of His mercy, but also of His favour. There is no wrath in God towards the penitent, however grievously he may have sinned in the past. Penitence is the evidence that the soul is judging and condemning its sin within itself. We do this in Christ Jesus. We judge our sin in union with Him Who condemned all sin in Himself, and "*there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*"²

The thought of the favour of God is one which grows unto a deep and strong gladness of soul as we pursue

¹ Ps. cxxx. 3, 4.

² Rom. viii, 1.

it to its ultimate issue. “*His merciful kindness is great towards us.*”¹ It must be so seeing that His love anticipates every movement on our part. Let any one rest in the thought—God favours me, God loves me—until the wonder, the hope, the joy, the sureness of it irradiates his entire consciousness, and he will perceive a little of this Divine attribute of graciousness. But when in our prayer, as we rest in the thought of all the Beloved is to us, He speaks to the soul in the full and penetrating joy of His Heart, and declares His favour, His love: then, indeed, it is as a light upon the way. The powers of the soul are made both more free, and also more sure in action. The whole being is exalted in spiritual dignity; for the love of God is the very crown of spiritual dignity. “*In His favour is life.*”²

The next word of revelation is “*longsuffering*”; and perhaps no word could express more tenderly the mind of God towards us. We know the plague of our own hearts; we know how quickly we may lose even the impression made by the previous word. It is, indeed, wonderful as we receive it, yet it may fade, not of itself, but because we may allow its clearness to be marred by other impressions less spiritual and pure. We may have failed in this way before, and so we fear the possibility of failure in the future. Moses had already proved the fickleness of the Israelites. Might they not by some fresh sin forfeit the favour of God? Were they not even now especially undeserving because of their amazing idolatry? But He “*is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish.*”³ The love of God is such that He

¹ Ps. cxvii, 2,² Ps, xxx, 5,³ 2 S, Pet, iii, 9,

can never desire the death of a sinner; but will keep His mercy for the day of that repentance for which He gives His special grace. Not until man finally refuses the love of God will He withhold His favour.

This is the great assurance which underlies the faithful use of the ministry of reconciliation. The great Sacrament of Penance is the abiding assurance within the Church of God's longsufferance, a continual, re-affirmation of His Own word—He is longsuffering. It is effectual in the soul's restoration to the favour of God when it has been lost, and in the tender reassurance of it in those who, having not lost it, are seeking only more lovingly to abide in it. The right use of this Sacrament is not understood before we can use it as an act of love, and not merely as a means of reconciliation. We need to rise above the simple desire for forgiveness, to be made more pure in soul, and consequently more pure in love. We should aspire to that pureness which successive intuitions of Divine love and holiness enable us to perceive as alone worthy of God. A true purpose of love in our acts of penitence will give effect to the aspirations which have been inspired by the knowledge of God's holiness and love.

As we contemplate this attitude of God towards us, shown in a threefold declaration of His love, we begin to understand that nothing is withheld from us. There is no barrier to love on God's part. If any exist, it is of our own making. What may not be expected where love is so complete and free? If with S. Paul we cry, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*"¹ so, also, there is nothing He

¹ Rom, viii. 35-39.

will withhold from them that love Him. This is the prospect open to us as in Christ we perceive and know both the love of God, and also all that is assured to us through love.

Already we perceive in God what the next word proclaims: "*abundant in goodness and truth.*" We understand the Divine liberality which places the treasures of the Heart of Jesus at the command of love in those that seek Him. And as there is no end to those treasures of love, so is there no end to the glories of eternal truth, in God. Thus He is declared, thus He proclaims Himself, the whole satisfaction of the faithful soul. The truth of all this is not readily accepted by those who are not trained to look beyond such satisfaction as may be given by the creature to the creature. But even such souls are unsatisfied. They have desires altogether higher and more spiritual which will not be denied; and at times they become imperious in their insistence. The lower satisfaction is altogether lost in the strange inexpressible longing for that which is high, and spiritual, and enduring. To the soul thus spiritually awakened God speaks. He offers the satisfaction of the uncreated love without which we cannot rise to our predestined spiritual state. Man is created with capacity for the uncreated. Hence the restlessness of the soul without God, without the treasure of His love.

Perhaps the most wonderful thought running through the Divine proclamation is this: God declares that in all that He is, He is that not merely in Himself essentially, and for Himself only; He is all this *to us, and for us*. The thought of us, and of our needs, the requirement of our spiritual nature, is ever

with Him. Our very needs are bound up with His Own essential attributes. No one can contemplate God and not be raised in understanding of himself. There is a supernatural dignity of sainthood which the world does not understand, only because it does not know the essential relation between God and the spirit of man. To know ourselves as immortals, to claim a heavenly citizenship, to live above the world, is not pride, but the true and just recognition of what we are before God. If we live habitually in the presence of the King we must reveal the fact by that which is the consequence of that association. It is not that we shall seek occasion for its manifestation; but that we shall become more and more what the citizens of Heaven should be, that is, what the Saints are already in their likeness to the Beloved.

This leads us to the thought of becoming. *How?* First and before all things we need to cultivate personal devotion to our Lord in the intimate ways of love, aspiring to the uncreated love, the fulness of the Divine life. In no other way can we advance to the knowledge of the Divine attributes. Moses was the intimate friend of God.¹ It was when this intimacy had developed to a degree of very holy confidence that he received this revelation of the inner glories of Divine love. If we are true in seeking the perfection of love between ourselves and the Beloved, we shall advance in the knowledge of those attributes—the mercifulness, the graciousness, the longsufferance, the goodness, the truth of God, not only as He manifests them toward us in the midst

¹ Cf. Deut. xxxiv. 10-12.

of the manifold needs and experiences of our days; but also as they exist in Him, and combine in the glory of His love. They are not mere experiences of God's love to man, they are the perfections of His Nature. He could not be otherwise than "*merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.*" He cannot assume a character. He is, or He is not. What He is in essence that He must be also in manifestation. There is no changeableness in God, and there is no confusion: "*I am that I am.*"¹

We ought, therefore, to concern ourselves chiefly with the reality of love between ourselves and God, making it more and more perfect. And this we shall do by rising through all affection of creatures to the uncreated love. Nor need we fear that our conceptions of Divine love will be too exalted, or so far out of the range of every-day necessities as to make us unpractical and wanting in prudence when dealing with human affairs. There is nothing in the life of a Christian that can be regarded as independent of his relation to God. Everything, therefore, in his life is within the sphere of Divine love. The way of perfect love is immediately before us, and everything in life may be made a means to perfection. Through the love thus cherished and developed God will perfect our knowledge of Himself. There is not an experience of the spiritual life which is not in some sense an experience of Divine love. In everything we are affected by it. One or another of the Divine attributes is ever being shown through the care of God for us. We can look away from

¹ S. James i, 17; Exod, iii, 14,

every experience to contemplate in Him the attribute which for the moment is evident, and thus gain continually in sacred knowledge. A little thought will convince us of the value, in this connection, of every part of daily life from which we can look direct to God in some way of loving recognition of His attributes. Our days may become very wonderful in contemplation of Him.

We do more. He Whom we so learn to understand is He Whom we *love*. The sacred way is the pathway of discipleship wherein we learn as we love, and love as we learn. It is the way wherein the soul follows in closest companionship with the Beloved. Often we may see the marks of this growing knowledge after some period of aridity, or of danger. We go down, as it were, into ways which for the time appear very dry and barren; but we are not alone. He Who loves us will prove His love to us in those ways by which our own devotion is tested. We may find greater blessing in purer knowledge of the Beloved, when the way is difficult, than ever we should have found in easier paths. It may be with us as with the Bride in the Cantic—the very Angels may rejoice saying: “*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?*”¹ There is a new and closer bond of love in that hour, because we know Him better, because He has come to us in clearer—yea, and dearer—manifestation of some Divine attribute, and we have perceived His beauty. Our love has grown, our whole inner life has been enriched, and we behold His glory with deepened consciousness of the “endless Heavens of His love.”

¹ Cant. viii. 5. See Frontispiece.

O Eternal Father, Who through Thine only Begotten Son hast brought us to the knowledge of Thine infinite tenderness and goodness towards us, and hast in Him assured us of Thy favour; We beseech Thee to confirm in us this Thy loving-kindness by uniting us to Thyself in love, whereby we may know Thee perfectly in those attributes of Thy majesty; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

XIII

Divine Attributes (2)

“And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.”—Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

“I prayed unto the Lord my God. . . . O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments.”—Dan. ix. 4.

“I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine Own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”—Isa. xliii. 25.

ONE most certain development of our life in the sacred way is towards the wider, and yet, also, more intensive, knowledge of God’s love, both in guiding us to penitence, and then also most wonderfully answering to it, and revealing His tenderness and loving desire towards us within the very sorrow we feel. His tenderness is wonderful, unspeakable, just because it is pure love in operation within the soul; but by reason of its pureness it braces the whole being for

the efforts necessary to perfect repentance. Penitence is always a wonder of grace and a revelation of love; but the wonder and the revelation arrest us never so much as when we mark the penitence of one whose sanctity is acknowledged. There is a refinement of contrition peculiar to the Saint, which is a development from early sincerity through long years of loving devotion. It reaches perfection as the soul is taken into close union with its Lord. It is altogether a mistake to suppose that they whose lives are viewed as faultless by others have no interior consciousness of sin. Often they suffer much from a sense of sin wholly unknown to less perfect souls. It is not always for themselves alone that they suffer; they often realize a high vocation through that very grace of contrition. They are great souls, and they suffer with their Lord.

The early movements of love which led to penitence in the beginning of our spiritual life were not as deep as those of later days, when we had learned more of the nature of sin, and understood more of the mind of God towards it; and in particular, the inner meaning of the Passion and Sacrifice of our Lord on Calvary. They lacked that depth of understanding which has come with years of spiritual experience, and manifold proofs of Divine love. At first we wondered why we were led, let us say, to make a general confession; and yet we could not shake ourselves free from the conviction that we *must* so renew our contrition. It was our own personal experience of a particular operation of the Holy Ghost Who is the supreme Guide of souls. In some souls He works towards that refinement of contrition which is characteristic of the

Saints, and of all, in fact, who are able to enter into real sympathy with the Beloved in His perfect act of penitence—that is His Passion. It is no morbid dwelling upon sin, but a clear spiritual perception of what sin is, and of the love of God for the sinner. It is love within the soul which is concerned more about the honour of God than even its own advantage. It is love whereby the soul is prepared for, and attains to, a very high knowledge of God. It is love uniting the heart of the disciple to the Sacred Heart of his Lord, and making him a partaker both of the sorrows and joys of the Beloved.

As we ponder the experience of Moses and the revelation vouchsafed to him, we trace this same interior work. He was exalted in spirit, made mystically one with Christ Whose atoning work he beheld afar off; and in the light of that revelation all his past sense of sin, and all his conscious unfitness for the high mission entrusted to him, must have been taken up into a very pure and sweet perception of the thought of God towards the sinner, man, who was, for all his sin, the creature of His love. Thus to perceive the truth concerning Divine love working for man's salvation must have widened his own view of the opportunities set before mankind, each and all of which would lead man towards the holiness of God; for every spiritual opportunity would present an ideal of holiness towards which he might aspire.

But above all there must have been granted to him very pure intuitions both of God's holiness and His love. We cannot understand all that is necessary to the forgiveness of sin unless we have understanding of these. The successive terms of the Divine pro-

clamation declared with intensifying thought the central truth of God's holiness and love which we now contemplate in its vindication upon Calvary. We are so familiar with this truth, embedded in the very substance of the Catholic Faith, that we cannot quite readily appreciate the joy of the moment when the soul of Moses was exalted to the contemplation of it. But joy it undoubtedly was; joy so keen that the covering hand of God, and the imparting of His strength would be needed for the support of his soul in life. The human soul is created for this joy, and we realize neither our capacity for it, nor our weakness to support it, until we begin to have experience in the higher ways of prayer. But it is for us; and as it enters into and enlarges the soul's capacity, it is found to be the very means whereby spiritual natures are filled with the knowledge of God. We know Him not by distant contemplation, but by reason of that union of love, the mystical union, wherein we both possess Him and are possessed by Him. Rare as such experiences may be, we know they are not beyond the working of Divine love even in this life. What God has so wrought in His Saints abides for ever in the consciousness of the Church, the encouragement of all who would follow them in the sacred way.

We may notice also that we are taught by all such working of love in the Saints the manner of God's Own Self-revealing in the life of glory. Love must ever attract loving spirits to its own centre. "*God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*"¹

Out of this glorious manifestation of Divine holiness

¹ 1 S. John iv, 16.

and love, there came the next word of the proclamation of God's attributes : "*keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.*" In Christ Moses saw the grounds of that mercy kept, that forgiveness assured. If we think of God ever by His Own will preserving the intention of mercy, so that moment by moment it is offered in its fulness to the penitent, so also we think of Him in His knowledge of all who down the ages may supplicate Him. And yet not as separate acts of love, nor as though His thought were divided. The mercy of God is an essential attribute of His majesty, and so His act whereby He proclaims it is the perfect expression of Himself. He could not otherwise declare Himself. But we dare not say that in His mercy He imposes no conditions upon the penitent. He wills to forgive, but there is a law of forgiveness which embraces the penitent with God, and operates in love for the putting away of sin. We ask, therefore, what are the grounds of forgiveness ?

When the Son of God gave Himself a willing offering and sacrifice for sin, He atoned for all our misdeeds by His act of perfect penitence. Taking our sins upon Himself, being made sin for us,¹ as S. Paul declares with his profound insight into the awfulness of our Lord's self-identification with sinners, He judged sin and condemned it in Himself. The deep truth of this, wholly affecting us as it does, is one which we apprehend more and more clearly as we advance in the sacred way. We have rejoiced in our restoration when wilfully, or ignorantly, we have wandered from the way²; and according to the degree

¹ 2 Cor. v, 21.

² See chap. v.

of our love we realized that our forgiveness was assured because of a certain oneness of love between us and our Lord. But more than this, as we have dealt with imperfections and sins, as we knew them within ourselves, seeking Absolution as a means of grace out of a growing desire of love, we have tried to approach the matter of penance from the basis of union with Christ. We have judged and condemned sin in ourselves, and sorrowed over it, in conscious union with Him. Our penitence has been taken up into His great Act, and made effectual. We understand that the real grounds of forgiveness are higher than any external conditions, such as knowledge of sin, and a will to amend, necessary as these are. We are forgiven because in love, in will, in attitude towards sin we are one with Christ.

It is one aspect of the calm strength developed within the soul in the sacred way. When the very character of our sins has changed because our whole inner life is being brought under obedience to the love of God; when we feel the sinfulness of moods and tendencies of thought and feeling, because of the sustained interior witness of love; when from experience of union with God we turn to look at our own conduct critically,—then it is that the higher grounds of forgiveness become apparent to us. We begin to look at all the ways of life with desire for the glory of the Beloved, and with desire for ourselves that in Him we may be kept in purity of soul. We share the vision by which Moses was instructed in the necessity of union with Christ as the ground of forgiveness.

This enables us, further, to understand the scope of the next words in the Divine declaration—“*and*

that will by no means clear the guilty." The truly penitent soul stands on the side of God, in direct opposition to the sin, not only of mankind in general, but also in particular to the sin which mars his own life. The more perfect his penitence, in other words the more truly he loves, the more is he separated in will from his sin, and may in that sense be regarded as not guilty. It would be against all charity to treat him as still branded with the sin.¹ So, on the other hand, a soul without penitence is guilty. He is not in will detached from his sin. He has not the love which would carry him over to the side of God. He still inclines to the sin. When, therefore, God declares He "*will by no means clear the guilty,*" He declares only another side of that law of forgiveness which embraces the penitent with God. That which gathers all penitent souls to the Heart of God, naturally excludes the impenitent. God cannot "*clear the guilty*" because he has no desire to be identified with Divine righteousness. With the Passion and Sacrifice of the Son of God before us, we cannot assume an unconditional pardon of the guilty; but we do see, and joyfully acknowledge, the way of penitence by which every soul capable of contrition may be not only assured of forgiveness, but also established in union with God in Christ.

Thus we approach a true and strong conception of that right attitude towards sin which should become the characteristic of healthy Christian life, *the willing of righteousness*. The spiritual attitude of very many is of a negative kind, they do not will evil, neither do they will righteousness. They are content so long

¹ Cf. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, pp. 37, 38.

as they are not on the side of evil; but they appear to forget that there are sins of omission. "*He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad.*"¹ Our Lord condemns that merely negative attitude as being in reality one of opposition to Himself. At least it is unworthy of a child of God. If we have received the revelation of His holiness and love, and fail to respond in the only manner worthy alike of ourselves and of God, we must suffer eternally some loss of spiritual greatness. We are tested by every revelation to our souls of God's goodness and holiness. If we respond to the test by showing ourselves ready and willing for greater things, we shall be rewarded with grace to attain to them, but if we fail to respond we injure our whole future. It is one of the subtle temptations to which we are liable in the sacred way. It is so easy to fail at the very moment when most of all we should go forward with determination in the way of God's righteousness. We can be too satisfied with ourselves to make the required effort. But in truth every step of our way should be marked by steadfast willing of righteousness, a desire for God in everything. Surely the renewed, yet ever-deepening, visions of Divine holiness are granted because the soul rises as by steps—and each step a vision. God gives light not only to guide those whose feet are rightly set in the sacred way, but also that they who wander may be attracted again to the safe pathway. But always the coming of the light is an implied call to the soul to be ready and faithful.

What we sorely need is not so much the power to

¹ S. Matt. xii. 30.

rejoice in the light given, as the will to follow where it leads. We must not merely contemplate the vision of sainthood which glows in every ray of Divine light which rests upon us; we must make it our own. One of the most inspiring and bracing of all the thoughts which come to us out of the vision is that we may ourselves, through this strong determination of soul, participate in the very holiness and righteousness of God. Pursue the thought and the reality of all that may be attracts us with a force that becomes in us the very urgency of love. The vision presented is one of transcendent beauty. If at the first the demands made upon us appear as lines of severity in an otherwise attractive picture, they are found, as we draw nearer, to be themselves necessary to its very conception.

But however we ponder the details of revelation we cannot express their hold upon ourselves in any way but that of simple willingness and energy in working righteousness. The whole expression of our love is concentrated upon a certain desired oneness with God in His Divine working. Our wills are merged into His will; and as that becomes the realized state of our souls the gladness of the coming victory of righteousness exalts us, and makes us really enthusiastic for God. His goodness, His mercy, His ever-ready forgiving love, all that He declares of Himself raises us to a degree of surpassing gladness and assurance. But we are still in the world—and in the world is sin.

Over the vision there passes a shadow. We can think of it as apparent to Moses as the words fell solemnly in warning: “*visiting the iniquity of the*

fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Even at the moment of highest revelation, as the proclamation ended, the warning was uttered. The consequences of persistent sin are declared in warning against presumption. The mercies of God are contingent upon man's faithfulness. Sin is declared to be terrible in its consequences beyond the experience of the soul which first sins, and so the warning against unfaithfulness is made more forceful. And so long as sin remains the shadow and the warning will be found together. But the vision before us loses nothing. Always as we press on to the glory we are escaping from sin. That is the point. The pilgrim in the sacred way heeds the warning and pursues his way marking how the light beyond him grows intensely pure, while with contrite love he enters into closer union with his Lord.

That is the simple necessity revealed alike to Moses and to ourselves; and it is emphasized by the life-story of every Saint. If we would know the deep things of God, if we would know Him in the glory of His attributes, we must be in union with Christ. In Him, by Him, we have access unto the Father. "*In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*" But apart from Him there is only loss, the darkness and misery of sin with all its untraced consequences. Do we sometimes wonder at the strictness and interior carefulness of the Saints? We can no longer be surprised when once we have perceived for ourselves the contrast between the pure light which marks the sacred way and the darkness which deepens on either hand. The revelation of God in the glory of His

attributes becomes a joy to be evermore desired. Yea, it is ours while yet we seek it.

And so, with hearts moved to profounder love we contemplate the vision vouchsafed to us. Did we ask to be shown the glory? Have we understood the deep truths of God's Being? Do we expect to go beyond all we have received, and in some higher ways be taught yet more concerning Him? True, as we advance, and the end of the sacred way becomes more plainly near, we may hope for more perfect knowledge. But it will not be different from that which has already been gained, but rather the deepening of it. It is as though but one vision were ever before us, yet becoming every day more lovely and alluring, more clear in its fulness. It is as though God in His love were imparting to us not simply new things, but rather the power to understand old things better. Or, we understand that as all His attributes are essential to His glory, so we do but find them at their source as we discover the wonderful secrets of His love. Contemplation of God in His Self-revelation leads to the joyous understanding of that which in Him is ever old and ever new. In Him the past lives and the future exists in the eternal present; and as we hold everything which in the past we have learned of Him, we find in the present that which is yet more beautiful. Love must respond in praise of all we perceive in Him; and our steps are quickened in the sacred way as praise exalts our spirits.

As we thus go on we know not how near the end may be, indeed we are not much concerned about it; for His presence and His love are our immediate joy; and in order that we may hereafter enter into

the fulness of life in Him, we are careful to do all that is possible now, to acquire all graces and virtues now, to grow in love now, eagerly longing to make this present life fruitful in merit through the grace of our Lord Beloved; so that when the full and perfect vision is given, we may enter into the glory as they who already know.

The sacred way has no abrupt ending. It melts into the glory and the light. Being itself the way of love, love in its perfection—that is, God in the fulness of His glory is the end of all our seeking, and our eternal satisfaction.

Love seeks, and in seeking finds both itself and its reward.

O God, Who keepest mercy for thousands, and dost assure the penitent of Thy ready forgiveness; grant us so to persevere in contrite love that we may merit Thy gracious favour and the pardon of all our sins; through the satisfaction of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

XIV

Adoration

“Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.”—Exod. xxxiv. 8.

“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”—Ps. xxix. 2.

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”—Ps. xcv. 6.

“Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy.”—Ps. xcix. 5.

EVERY revelation of God to the soul quickens love, and love inspires adoration. The virtue of religion is practised by special acts, and adoration must be regarded as one of the highest of those acts, if indeed it be not the highest of all. It may be defined as “the lowly submission and homage paid by us to the immense majesty of Almighty God.”¹ It is an act inspired by love, and performed in faith. But love and faith are assisted and exalted as often as God in tender love to the soul reveals Himself in holiness and power. The soul in loving consciousness of God hastens to adore Him.

This is borne out by the experience of such great

¹ Cf. Scaramelli, *Directorium Asceticum*, Vol. III. chap. iii.

souls as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, S. John, S. Paul, and after them a host of Saints who, though reticent about themselves, have yet told enough of their own experiences to assure us of the continuity of the principle which underlies adoration. Throughout this chapter this particular view must be remembered. In ordinary practice we should seek occasions for acts of adoration. Prayer should include such acts; while adoration of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, or adoration of the Divine majesty in union with the Angels or Saints, will be an essential part of every day's devotion. But we must now consider adoration as it is called forth under special spiritual conditions or circumstances.

Adoration is an intense and strong expression of love towards its object. While there is submission of the one loving to the one loved, there is also the profound and consuming desire on the part of the one loving to celebrate worthily the perfections of the one loved. It may be, possibly, the strongest and most intense act of which an intelligent being is capable. Certainly we can form no higher conception of adoration than that of the Seraphim. In whatever other way those intensely loving spirits express the homage of their being to God, Whose Divine nature and glory they contemplate, they appear to surpass all other acts in adoration; and it is not without significance that they who are pre-eminently adoring spirits, are seen nearest the Throne of God. We recognize the place which we should give to adoration as an act of religion. It is so high, so important, that we may see it perfectly performed only by pure spirits. We attain to no perfection in

adoration without love, which we perceive to be the secret of their service.

The Seraphim are strong, loving spirits, and in the perfect homage of love consists their adoration. Their love finds no adequate expression in such words as were understood by Isaiah and S. John : “ *Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts.* ” ¹ Beyond all words there is a voiceless outpouring of love. Are we surprised at this ? Do we think that they, the mightiest of the Angelic Orders, must know nothing of limitations ? To all created intelligence there is a limit of power. The power of the Seraphim is vast in itself, and measureless as compared with our own, but it is yet less than Divine and therefore limited ; and none realize it as they themselves. Their deep sense of the surpassing majesty of God is expressed in the war-cry of the glorious S. Michael, “ *Who is like God ?* ” To adore God perfectly, that is, if their adoration is to be commensurate with His perfections, they must be His equals, which is impossible. Therefore they must adore with their whole being filled and moved to their uttermost capacity with love. This is true of all the Angelic Orders in their degree. And thus is presented for our contemplation the concerted homage of the Angels, a ceaseless Act with which we may unite our own acts of adoration. As we learn from them we aspire to their purity of worship, and knowing the close association between Angels and men which is according to the Divine order, we can but desire to unite with them. We do not think of profiting by any possible merit on their part ; but lovingly we

¹ Isa. vi. 3 ; Rev. iv. 8.

claim that which belongs to the perfection of creaturely worship—the association of Angels and men, the perfect worship of God.

That which we understand of the Angels in their worship is also true of the Saints according to their capacity of spirit, and according to their perfection in grace and love. And herein we observe that it is true in particular of Moses in the experience which we are considering. Man can adore God only to the extent of his love for Him, and his power through grace. And further, adoration is not left to man's fancy, or to any caprice in his devotion. *It is due to God. Being what He is, God must be adored.* In the harmony of the Divine life, in the unity of Divine perfections, the note of adoration appears to be requisite. Is it conceivable that God should *not* be adored? *No!* Created intelligence *must* respond in some way to the perfections of the Creator; they must recognize this as an imperative necessity arising out of their relation to Him, a relation far more intimate than we readily perceive, for it is rooted in the deepest mystery of love. It is this relation which makes possible the highest and most divine expressions of love in angel or man, and, therefore, makes their worship intelligent and pure.

Adoration is both recognition and response. It is love reaching outward and upward to its own source in gladdest self-donation. Thus every act of adoration is an approximation of the creature to his highest act towards God. It is a wonderfully helpful and encouraging thought. There is nothing in it that does not suggest hope. There is no hint of the impossible; for adoration is that expression of homage

and worship to which we turn ourselves in the exercise of love. And as all our acts of love may be relatively perfect, that is, perfect according to the degree of love to which we have attained, so adoration is not wanting in any true act of love: it is present in the love.

With this to guide and encourage us, we may safely consider the examples of the Saints. They help us because they are human like ourselves. It is true that we, as they, may contemplate the Angelic Orders in their unhindered adoration and find ourselves, at however great a distance, still linked to them by the simple fact of love; for, as we have seen, love is the beginning of all adoration. But the Saints are nearer to us in their human experience, and therefore we learn naturally and immediately from them, as much from their struggles and aspirations as from their surprising devotion. Their conflicts resulted in pureness of soul and refinement of spiritual perception. Hence their sublime experiences of God which drew them to adoration.

“And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped,” constrained by the revelation of God, and impelled by the love of his own heart. That which he had received from God was so full of the truth of personal Divine love for the souls of men, that instinctively he responded. It was God’s answer to the longing of His servant whose desire had been expressed, *“I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.”* It may have been that his words but half expressed the feeling of his heart, as even our best prayers when made in words fail of some longed-for power of expression. And so, as God answered

him, Moses found his unspoken desire and longing of spirit satisfied in the wondrous joy of being loved of God. He hastened to worship. He adored.

But let us at this point remind ourselves that what was revealed to Moses in this extraordinary and mystical experience was the substance of the Catholic Faith. The love of God to man, the mystery of the Incarnation, of the Atonement, of acceptance in Christ, of union and exaltation with Him, all these are implied and indeed contained in the revelation to Moses. There is even the truth of our Lord's Own words foreshadowed : "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life : no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.*"¹ And Moses, as He perceived the truth, adored. Yet we, with all our catholic advantages, do not always realize the greatness of our own blessings while we make profession of our faith. The very mysteries which drew the soul of Moses upward in adoration, move us, alas ! so very little. We are so accustomed to the truths of the Faith that we pass over their deep significance ; and that which might move us to adoration enters hardly at all into our minds, to the great loss of devotion and spiritual attainment. It would be an immense gain if Christians generally would more frequently meditate upon the mysteries of the faith, choosing them as subjects of their prayer in preference to those which appear easier. It is a matter which calls for the earnest attention of the faithful.

A little reflection will confirm the truth of this in the case of anyone who has not yet learned the place and value of adoration as an act of religion. Where

¹ S. John xiv. 6.

there has been failure in the past there may yet be definite practice in the future. Adoration needs to be prepared for; and the preparation will be both remote and proximate. In general we may say that where there is meditation upon the Divine mysteries, there is simple and natural preparation for adoration; and this includes both remote and proximate preparation; because in the present we profit by the experiences and graces of other days. We may prepare, and we may from time to time very definitely and lovingly aspire to this degree of devotion; but we cannot in the lower degrees of prayer rise at will to adoration. It would seem that only by special grace we can do that. I know that some may dissent from this view, claiming that adoration is possible also on lower levels of prayer, and that the will may be directed most efficaciously to that end. But we are considering in particular the rarer moments of pure adoration to which souls may be raised by some loving revelation of God. These in their very nature cannot be frequent; but there may be acts of adoration very real though less exalted, as the result of meditation; and they will become more perfect as the soul advances in prayer. While, therefore, a certain exaltation of love seems to be required for an act of perfect adoration, it is possible so to cultivate the habit of devotion as to make the higher movements of love less difficult and more frequent. If we are right in our view that adoration is a necessity as regards both God and man, then every movement of aspiring love on our part must meet with a most certain response and gift on His part. There is no limit that we can mark to the possibilities of advance in this

direction; but we must not be slack in availing ourselves of them. God is honoured by the use we make of the means He provides for our advancement, and love will not be slow to recognize them.

The life of prayer cannot fall short of adoration, because with the increasing attraction of the soul to affective prayer there is also a development of all that is requisite to adoration. Affective prayer is the ready movement of love within the soul which has looked into Divine mysteries, and lives in the consciousness of Heavenly realities. It is the prayer of one who has experienced much in spirit and treasures the graces which God has bestowed. Such an one cannot recall a truth concerning God without a strong revival of the love with which it has been received and held; and love with every renewal mounts to its eternal source, and often it is an act of adoration.

There is no doubt that the state of love implied by affective prayer is fruitful in other ways, and chiefly in those graces by which God raises the soul to higher knowledge of Himself, all of which should be followed by acts of adoration. We should hasten, as did Moses, to bow down in spirit, to worship and adore, allowing no opportunity to pass. Such moments are of eternal value and should be employed to the uttermost. We should esteem them all the more if we fully appreciated them; but in this, as in every necessity of our own devotional life, we are often unready, if not positively slothful. We forget that for us the time is short.

But we notice in the case of Moses that this high degree of devotion was accompanied by a very holy

consciousness of God's favour and goodwill; and, moreover, of a certain prevailing power of love within himself. He began to make request, he offered a petition; and God accepted him. It was a great prayer, for great things. It was no less than a prayer embracing the whole future of his people from the spiritual side: "*And he said, If now I have found grace in Thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us; for it is a stiffnecked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thine inheritance.*"¹ In the boldness of confident love he made his appeal on the ground of that very proclamation which God had made concerning Himself. Would not He Who was declared as "*keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,*" extend that mercy and forgiveness to the erring people of Israel?

Adoration and strong petition are thus found together. Is that exceptional? No. Rather it is an example of that which is found where souls have attained to a high degree of prayer. Confidence in God grows as His Divine favours are experienced. His favours increase as the soul delights in Him. Thus the love in which the soul and the Beloved are united is the ground of that assurance which the soul feels in asking anything of Him. "*Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.*"² That love which rises to pure adoration may well be strong and confident. There is even at such supreme moments of vehement love, the impulse to make requests, to offer the desires of our hearts; and we may rightly obey the impulse. In such times of

¹ Exod. xxxiv. 9.

² Ps. xxxvii. 5.

spiritual exaltation the lower selfish impulses are in subjection, and that of which we are conscious is from God. If we are impelled to ask anything, if our desires are great, we ought to obey the impulse; for we are moved only in accordance with the will of God, and He will grant that which we ask for. In the case of Moses we see that his prayer answers to the personal proclamation of God. That which He declares of Himself, and makes known to the soul in the communication of His love, He is ready immediately to confirm by some answer to prayer. This working of love, in the union of the soul with the Beloved, is that which He Himself declared: "*If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*"¹

A certain boldness and courage will develop in the soul which thus perseveres in loving prayer. It will not be the boldness of presumption, nor the false courage of rashness; but rather a settled strength which is proved in calmness under all demands. If we may so express it, it is the unhesitating confidence of love which is so perfected in God, that not to ask and attempt great things appears to the soul as a dishonour to Him. Great Saints have set us an example. They asked much, dared much; but they did not displease God. We seek the reason of this not in the matter of their requests, but in that understanding of love which preceded the prayer. In imitating them let us not begin with great requests, but with those efforts of love which lead to union with our Lord. We shall then not fail, nor need we fear to follow if He lead us to higher ways.

¹ S. John xv. 7; cf. *S. John of the Cross*, D.N., Bk. II. iii. 2, 3.

All this strikes us as very far removed from the early stages of the sacred way, the dangers and the mistakes, the wanderings or the falls; not that we are beyond all possible dangers, far from it, but we have ascended, the way has led upwards, and the light is clearer, the air is purer, the distance more attractive, we are stronger. We feel within ourselves the truth of a word fulfilled in part, and we trust yet being fulfilled: "*They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.*"¹

Strength: that is the characteristic of souls in the sacred way in whom is seen the developing beauty of sainthood. It is strength which increases. And first of all it is strength within the soul in its relation to God. There is strength in its love which has now become purer. The soul that loves in pureness is very strong, beyond even the knowledge of its own strength. The simplicity with which it receives the revelation of God, and responds to grace, hides from it its own greatness and preserves the beauty of its humility. But beneath all this there is supernatural strength; for there is needed great spiritual strength in one who is called to high knowledge and understanding of the things of God. Therefore as the sacred way leads onward in the higher way of knowing God, they who progress therein are made strong. In outward things also this supernatural strength of the soul is manifest. Great things are accomplished, victories won, and difficulties surmounted, by those whose weakness is apparent to all. In them is fulfilled the Divine word: "*My strength is made perfect*"

¹ Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

in weakness."¹ Their attitude towards all that concerns the outward life is one of calm resolution. They have not travelled so far without gaining that wisdom which is spiritual strength.² They can look on the world without fear, for they have proved its worth, that it may not be compared to the wisdom of God. "*The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*"³

In this strength the soul pursues its way. The end of its pilgrimage may be near. Already the sacred way seems as the very entrance into light and life. Every act of adoration, every strong prevailing prayer of love, every aspiration, anticipates somewhat the life that is to be. The glory of God in His perfections is the source of hidden joy, of incommunicable understanding. There is closer communion with the Saints. Everything is instinct with the growing sense of the nearness of the unseen, of the immanence of Heavenly life. And so the pilgrim soul goes onward perfecting through grace, only longing for the fulness of that of which love assures him.

O Eternal and Adorable Lord God, Who, that we may worthily worship Thee, hast made us capable of loving Thee; increase within us Thy gifts, and make us so strong in love that our service and worship may evermore be pleasing unto Thee, and that we may be found at the last prepared for the perfected praise of Heaven, where Thou art ceaselessly adored by Thy holy ones; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost reigneth in glory for ever. Amen.

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

² Prov. xxiv. 5.

³ 1 S. John ii. 17.

XV

Light

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."—Prov. iv. 18.

"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away."—Cant. ii. 17.

"Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."—Isa. lx. 20.

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."—Rev. xxi. 23.

THE Lady Julian, writing about the wonderful revelations she had received from our Lord, and the impressions which remained with her, describes the look with which at one time He regarded her: "His eyes were black, most fair and seemly, showing (*outward*) full of lovely *pity*, and (*showing*), *within* Him, an high regard, long and broad, all full of endless heavens."¹ His love appealed to her in many ways, and every one an opening, as it were, to an endless heaven. The simplicity of her language is our best help to the understanding, and, we may add, enjoyment, of what she tries to describe. She never darkens the vision by her own description of it. So

¹ *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 112.

here, she leaves us gazing into the luminous depths of love in the Heart of Jesus. Every expression, or thought, of that love carries away our mind to the contemplation of a heaven which is endless; an ever-deepening glory of Divine light.

This thought of the "endless heavens" seems to express exactly our own feeling as we contemplate the Divine love revealed in the several attributes of God. Limitless extension, boundlessness, mark the glory and activity of His love, even as eternity is the predicate of His Being. As we adore Him in His Self-revelation we are moved to a very wonder of gladness and love as we behold the endlessness of love and light in Him. When we can do no more, when we have prostrated in spirit before Him with devotion that, rising in strength, fails in utter powerlessness before the immensity of the life unveiled, we can only rest on the border-line, in silent contemplation. We are in the light of those "endless heavens." And the light is one.

This is the last experience of the soul in the sacred way which we shall try to understand. All that has gone before, all that has made up the life of years, the struggles, wanderings, returns, consolations, aspirations, yea, the very shadows, and fears, and weaknesses, have all in their own way prepared us for, and led us to, the present coming of light. If the past may be in any true sense compared to a night, this inflowing of light may be compared to the day-break. Yes, for all its beauty it is but the beginning. It is that light upon the way which will glow more and more unto the perfect day.¹

¹ Prov. iv. 18.

Few things in nature are more tenderly beautiful than the dawn. The light increases, the beauty of the earth and the glory of the sky, in mutual response, seem to call us to share in a great aspiration—Nature awakes with an aspiration to God. The Psalmist felt the thrill of its joy when he wrote of the sun “*which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.*”¹ Nature at daybreak, aspiring to the full glory of the day, makes her offering to God in obedience to the great law of her life. And the law of nature, as of spirit, declares the eternal love of God.

This is true of the light which rises upon the sacred way. It is the dawn of the Day for which we wait. It is the hope of the faithful soul. The Bride in the Canticle contemplates that dawn: “*until the day break and the shadows flee away.*”² For that we wait, yea, rather, to it we have come. We cannot truly be said to wait for that which is already rising upon us. And our care must be to behave ourselves within its glow as children of the light and of the day.

The true note of this dawn is aspiration, for consider how the understanding of the light leads to the very contemplation of the light of Heaven itself. The light of Heaven is that of the very Being of God. “*The Lamb is the light thereof.*”³ So then the light which rises upon the sacred way is the light of Him in Whom we live, the light of the coming of Him Whom

¹ Ps. xix. 5.

² Cant. ii. 17. I have followed S. Gregory and S. Bernard in their interpretation of this verse, rather than that which has been favoured by others who understand it of evening rather than morning.

³ Rev. xxi. 23.

we love. S. Bernard sees in this breaking of the day the very action of the Son of God, a Divine aspiration¹; and the thought is wonderfully helpful and encouraging to us in our progress. We are not only in the light as it glows upon our way, and illumines our souls; but also, because we are in union with Christ, we share His Divine aspiration, and the increase of the light proclaims the coming satisfaction of His Sacred Heart. He identifies Himself with the holiest hopes of love in His Own, and we cannot but aspire to the perfect Day when we feel His oneness with us.

We must be in harmony with the spirit of the dawn. There is aspiration in the ever-increasing light. There must be a like aspiration in the heart of the pilgrim as he sees "*the day approaching.*" Aspiration is a higher thing in itself than the desire for any promised reward. What we aspire to is the perfection of the Day of God, the perfection of personal life in holiness, the realization of all our powers in quick responsiveness to all that we perceive of God in the light of His Day. We aspire to our rightful place as children in the Kingdom of our Father. We aspire to that fulness of life and of power which is the fruit of His Own grace and love in the Saints. We hasten to develop, if so it may be, in all that fitness of soul, even as the light of dawn develops to the noontide. We want to be found of our Lord in the readiness of full and perfect love; for only so can we fittingly welcome Him at His coming.

This suggests a virile love, which in the light finds continual inspiration. All things will be done with

¹ Sermon lxxii.

reference to the Day. The Day ! We make it ours by every act of love—strong, courageous, heroic. There is no time to regard the shadows that are fleeing away ; they leave only the fairer light of God in which we find fresh need for active love. Even though the shadows, did we care to remember them, have been reminders of many things in the past through which we have been led into this present hour, we must have no regrets. God has triumphed in us by His grace and has brought us into the light, and in that light we must attain to all His love assures to us. We must aspire to all that for our Lord's sake, even as we feel He aspires to it for our sakes.

But aspiration implies real spiritual effort. Eagerness for the Day must be accompanied by faithfulness in every spiritual effort. The duties of the hours are real, and time is passing very quickly. Shall we meet our Lord in the full light of day, when no shadow will remain ? Shall we stand within the glory when the sacred way melts into the light of God ? These are questions which can be answered only within the soul that speeds forward with high hope, and higher aspiration in union with the Beloved.

It is an interior matter. What is His desire for us understood in the intimacy of love as union with Him becomes more wondrously real ? What is the secret of His love for us breathed forth in the Bosom of the Father in the aspiration of His Sacred Heart ? What is that deep unspoken necessity of our inner life which we realize only because we love Him ? Let us both ask and answer such questions with Him alone, and at once take action. It will not always, perhaps not often, be a work calling for external

energy; but rather a matter of interior work. We may be shown the need of some interior mortification in order to the perfecting of some hidden grace which our Lord seeks in us; or it may be He will lead us in higher ways of prayer, bidding us behold with Him some distant glory; or it may be He will hold us in the very stillness of love wherein the soul may expand unconsciously in His light only to go on again to higher things. And our joy in this increasing light upon the way is to prove how many and how great are the teachings of His love. We might suppose the soul would be impatient for the full day: but love is satisfied as it reposes in the Heart of the Beloved. His will is the law of our progress, and though we may long intensely for the Day of our release, love will wait His time. He must open the way, we must not force it. We may desire the strong action of His love towards us which shall set us free, but not for an instant shall we fail to use what He gives for the present. In the present He is preparing us for that very action of His love which we anticipate.¹

Whatever be the understanding of His will for us and His desire for us, or His aspiration through us, our part is plainly to make a steadfast response in love, to rise with His aspiration. We shall then rise with increase of light. Every thought from the Heart of the Beloved entering into our own will be as a ray of light, or rather as a brightening of the light already within us. In that light we shall behold ever fresh beauties of the eternal splendour, as it is said, "*in Thy light shall we see light.*"² Wonderful and rapid

¹ Cf. *S. John of the Cross*, *The Living Flame*, ii.

² Ps. xxxvi. 9.

should be the growth of the soul within that light. It seems necessary to our perfect development in sanctity, for as we cannot be holy if we have not love, seeing that "*God is love*";¹ so neither can we be holy if there be no light in us, for "*God is light.*"² When, therefore His light increases both within and upon the soul, let us recognize His will in our sanctification and rejoice as it becomes effectual in us. We may even to some extent mark its development.

In the first place the interior light of the soul becomes more and more clear. All that concerns our spiritual well-being, the needs and conditions, the possibilities and certainties, all that within us is subject to grace, is perceived in the light of God. We do everything on that supernatural level. We do not always realize the value of this time, because we cannot measure that which is won or attained through grace. But God, Who is working, knows both His Own purpose and the result of His work. If we are content to respond in unquestioning love and faith to His inspiration, without regard to the suggestions of self-love, He will complete His work. He will make the saint. He will make the soul itself a centre of light.

S. Paul could think of his beloved Philippians as being thus filled with light and shining in the world³; and the picture is not imaginary. We know that with the Saints this is no strange thought. In many instances their very presence appeared to be marked by a supernatural glow, while the inner light of their souls was declared by a certain radiance of personality. Sometimes it is our happiness to encounter souls of

¹ 1 S. John iv. 8.

² 1 S. John iv. 1, 5.

³ Phil. ii. 15.

this high order. They are radiant souls. Knowing not their own influence, they yet move amongst us, living witnesses to the light of the coming day. It is a joy to be with them. But always they look right on as they who mark the daylight upon some distant peak. The shadows have no terrors for them, even as the ways of the world have no attraction for them. But they are gracious souls. They carry into the life around them the light, the charm, the simple dignity of pure goodness. And when they are called away from us, we remember the light of their lives and are glad. Living in the light, their passing is into light—light beyond the shadows.

And they are always hopeful souls, we might almost say they are optimistic; but their optimism springs from their supernatural life. They are in the light and they know that darkness and gloom cannot prevail. Light is of God, and with God there is no darkness. Hence these brave souls in whom the light dwells have always hope for the world. Its darkest days cannot quench the light within them. Even as the darkness of Calvary was succeeded by the light of the Lord's Resurrection, so they know that light will return to the world that is darkened. We may test this brightness of hope to-day, if we will, as we mark the dark shadows—yea, more than shadows—which fall athwart the otherwise sunny days in many a life, many a home, many a fair land. Now, if ever, is the time to let our light shine. If we have within us the light we may be hopeful, for by its power we may discern the true grounds of hope. The soul, or the nation, that can rise to energy through the inspiration of a great hope, begins already to

taste the joy of fruition. If in the light of the dawn we see not only the prospect, but also the assurance of the perfect day, we can be strong in the hope of seeing it.

So it must be in this present time. Readers of these pages will not be slow to mark the signs of the times through which we are passing. Can we trace the beginnings of a new order? Are there signs of awakening spirituality? Above and through all the mist and heat of battle are there tokens of any high aspiration as from the soul of mankind? To such questions doubtless various answers may be given; but they in whom the light of God is glowing with any clearness must, we think, regard the present time with high hopefulness. We are faced with a tremendous opportunity, all the more wonderful and imperative in its call because of the approaching Day. Filled, inflamed with the love of God, we may find our place and our work in the present time. But how shall we work? We shall work not for any personal advantage, nor as looking for material results. Spiritual work is called for; that is, we must undertake all work spiritually, rising to the full dignity of our nature as immortals, making our life's work worthy of God, and worthy of the hope that we cherish. If we are aspiring to the fulness of life and light in the perfect day, our part is to contribute by every means in our power to that development of the Church's life. There is neither time nor place for the pursuit of merely selfish or temporal gains. If we are ourselves in the light, and continue in the light, we shall not care very much about the survival of our names, or the lingering of our reputation. Enough for us if

our work bear the final testing. Whatever it be "*the Day will declare it.*" Happy shall we be if it bear the test of the light of God.

The light as we perceive it in gathering luminance above the dark elements of this present time will not fail, for it is of God. We may fail—even we in whose souls it may now be shining in clearness. We may be so drawn into the darkness and blackness that even the hope of prevailing light may waver. But hope rests on faith and love : faith that holds to the truth ; love that rises above everything in the certain knowledge which it has within itself. The soul's strength, even as the end of the sacred way comes into view, is just the same that has kept it all along. At no moment can we feel so absolutely secure that we need no longer take care for the continuance of grace. But given love in its full power, faith in its calm strong confidence, hope in its divine buoyancy, there is nothing to fear. They are the abiding evidences of assured power in the Christian. They forbid despair, for the soul in which they are found lives in holy expectation. Our best is to come. Out of the present with its pain and terror will come another world, a world with a new prospect, a life shaped to nobler ideals, and moved by a purer spirit. Out of the night will arise the Day.

And what of the Day? May we, even here and now, from our place in the sacred way perceive more than vague suggestions of its glory? Let us remember the day is to us not only the perfection of light, but the perfection also of personal life. We advance with the light that even now is rising and increasing. If

with this light within and upon us we look onward to the perfect vision, no less do we with consciousness of developing life look on to our own place within it. We cannot say we know nothing of the glory that is to be. It is a source of joy to us that we do know at least some elements of that glory. Very much must lie beyond us, beyond our present powers of understanding and perception; yet there is certainty of knowledge which is extended as we grow in spiritual power. The light of that Divine knowledge is that of the Eternal Day which attracts us more and more. All that we can ever know is linked to what is now within us; and all that is too high to be known of us now is linked to that part of the vision which here we begin to know. All that is told us of the coming glory of the Day, or conveyed to us in mystic terms, answers to the knowledge of God and His love which we have already. And in this we mark the onward leading of the soul through all experiences in the sacred way. There has been no break in the sacred teaching of love whereby we have been trained in perception and knowledge.

All experience of the ways of God with souls shows that He is Self-revealed to men as they are *prepared* in love. This has been His way with ourselves; and we may be sure it is His way in all degrees of revelation. We advance into the light as we are made strong to endure the glory of it. And so we stand, each of us, to-day, in light according to our strength; and with the grace to attain to yet greater power.

The glory spread out before us is both veiled and revealed by the mystic description of it. Veiled to the unloving soul, it is very plainly shown to the

truly loving; for love is the key to its mysteries. Love rejoicing in the light now, contemplates each detail and learns the need of closer interior correspondence with Heavenly ideals; and from acts of wise discipline and mortification rises yet higher in aspiration, ardently desiring that which is revealed. If the longing of love at times compels the cry of anticipation: "*Even so come, Lord Jesus,*" it bears witness to the growing strength of the soul, and the purity of its desire.

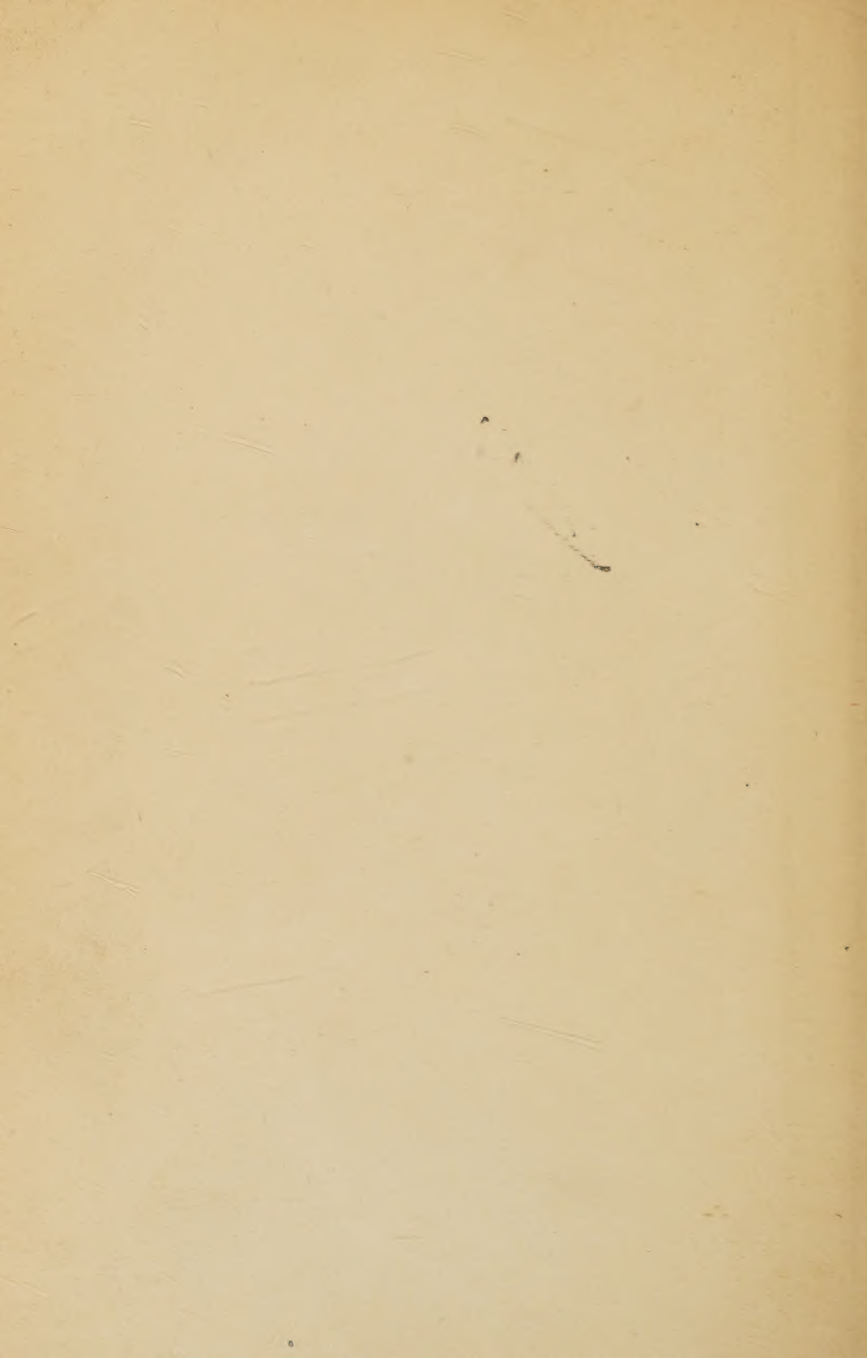
And this becomes more certainly the feeling and desire of those who as the end of the sacred way draws nearer, walk in the light, aspiring to its perfect glow. This is our part, and they who in love are faithful in this present time, will be found at the end of the days in their own place and lot according to the will of God.

O God, our Light and Joy, Who revealest to those that love Thee the unending glories of Thine Own Eternal Light; grant us so to live within the light, that we may both perceive the duties set before us in this present time, and also mark the way which leadeth to everlasting happiness in Thy kingdom in Heaven; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with Thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth in glory for ever. Amen.

O Everlasting God, Who art Thyself the reward of Thy Saints; perfect, we pray Thee, in our hearts, even here, the gifts both of Thy love and Thy light, that hereafter, with all Thy holy ones, we may serve and adore Thee Who art Love and Light Eternal; through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost everlastingly. Amen.

OLD THEO. SEMINARY
LIBRARY
NEW YORK

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BRUNSWICK ST., STAMFORD ST., S.E.,
AND BUNGAY SUFFOLK.



Brett, Rev. Jesse

248.35

B7565

The sacred way.

248.35

B7565

